Festival Hypnosis

Build a Rehearsed Set with Consent Checks, Spoken Scripts, and Clear Exits

Felix Ravenholt

Start with the work you need to finish

A written, rehearsed plan for a small set, including who not to approach, how to stop and how to close the interaction.

This book is for adults interested in consensual hypnosis entertainment in informal festival settings who are prepared to study and rehearse before performing.

Bring: Practice time, a suitable permitted setting, sober consenting adults and a willingness to cancel or stop.

The working method: Read the consent and return sections first; choose a limited set from the script library; rehearse the wording and exits; use a field plan instead of improvising beyond preparation.

Start with the four working sheets immediately after this introduction. They are part of the book, not an external download you must obtain. You can write on paper or copy the field labels into a document. The fictional worked example shows what a completed piece can look like; the reference sections explain choices and difficult cases. You do not have to finish the reference before making your first notes.

A useful first result is a filled brief: the real task, the available facts and the missing information. A blank field tells you what to find out. It is not permission to invent a detail. Completion takes your own checking and revision; this book does not promise a fixed time

or control over someone else's response.

Entertainment for sober, consenting adults only. No therapy, mind-control promise or guaranteed response. A book does not replace practical training or professional help when someone is unwell.

The named people and dialogue in the examples are fictional illustrations, not customer results. Their circumstances are not instructions to copy into your own situation. Treat strong rules of thumb as drafting defaults; the actual brief, recipient, privacy needs and applicable requirements take precedence.

Read the consent, return and troubleshooting chapters before attempting an exercise or rehearsal. The planning sheets do not qualify you to practise beyond your training, and an audience is not a substitute for a volunteer’s continuing consent.

Find the part you need

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Working sheet 1 — Before any approach

1. Permission for the location and activity checked

Your notes: _____
_____

2. Ground, exits, noise, nearby hazards and staff instructions assessed

Your notes: _____
_____

3. Who will not be approached; source consent guidance read

Your notes: _____
_____

4. Touch and recording boundaries made explicit

Your notes: _____
_____

5. Reasons to cancel rather than proceed

Your notes: _____
_____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 2 — The limited set

1. Chosen routine and its prerequisites in the reference

Your notes: _____
_____

2. Exact opening and consent wording I have rehearsed

Your notes: _____
_____

3. Stop signal and response to hesitation or withdrawal

Your notes: _____
_____

4. Failure exit and full return instructions beside the routine

Your notes: _____
_____

5. What I will leave out because I have not prepared it

Your notes: _____
_____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 3 — Rehearsal record

1. Date and setting of rehearsal, with a willing adult

Your notes: _____
_____

2. Wording I could deliver without searching for the next step

Your notes: _____
_____

3. Where I lost the sequence and what I need to practise

Your notes: _____
_____

4. Ending and return practised as carefully as the opening

Your notes: _____
_____

5. Ready to rehearse again / revise / stop; no guaranteed outcome

Your notes: _____
_____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 4 — Close and review

1. Suggestions and any agreed cues explicitly ended

Your notes: _____
_____

2. Participant oriented and comfortable; concerns addressed appropriately

Your notes: _____
_____

3. What actually happened, described without diagnosing trance

Your notes: _____
_____

4. Boundary, environment or preparation issue to change

Your notes: _____
_____

5. No identifying participant record, photo or story shared without consent

Your notes: _____
_____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

A set plan is a decision, not a list of effects

This is a fictional planning example, not a report of a successful performance.

The would-be performer has rehearsed the hand-magnet wording in the reference but has not practised a full group set. The plan therefore contains one approach, one consensual test and a complete close. It does not contain a rapid physical induction or a crowd routine just because those chapters exist.

The plan records three possible endings before the approach: the person declines; the person agrees but wants to stop; or the interaction reaches the planned close. The wording for each ending is rehearsed. “I will think of something” is an empty field, not an exit plan.

A second field records the setting. A place near a fire, tent lines, unstable seating or staff activity may be unsuitable regardless of how well the words were learned. Location permission and a volunteer’s willingness are separate questions. Neither makes the other unnecessary.

The reference is read in this order for preparation: Chapter 3 on consent; Chapter 14 on return; Chapter 15 on difficulties; then the explanation, approach and selected routine. A pocket card is a reminder after that reading, not a substitute for it.

For your plan, write down what you will omit. A limited, rehearsed set gives you a boundary. If the setting or participant no longer fits that plan, stop. Do

not interpret the audience's enthusiasm as a reason to override the person participating.

Before Anything Else

This book is written for adults. Everyone in it — the person you are working with, the people watching, and you — is eighteen or older. That is not a formality. Half the craft in these pages is knowing who to ask, and a person who cannot legally consent is not on the list.

Nothing here is therapy, medicine, or a substitute for either. It does not treat anxiety, pain, addiction, insomnia, trauma, or anything else. If someone at your campsite is genuinely struggling, the correct move is not a hypnotic routine. It is a conversation, and if it goes beyond a conversation, a professional. There is a chapter in this book about people who bring you a real problem. The whole chapter is about saying no kindly.

Do not use anything in this book on someone who is drunk, high, or coming down. This is stated here, on the second page, because it is the single rule most likely to be ignored and most likely to cost you. Chapter 3 explains why in detail, and gives you a thirty-second test to apply.

Do not use anything in this book on a person who has told you they have epilepsy or a seizure disorder, a heart or circulatory condition, psychosis or bipolar disorder, a recent trauma, or who is pregnant. You will not be diagnosing anyone — you will be asking one question, once, and believing the answer.

Hypnosis does not remove anybody's will. It does not make people compliant against their nature, it does not

implant memories, and it does not produce permanent change from a single evening on a lawn. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something. What it does do is real, repeatable, and — done properly — one of the best things that will happen at that campsite all weekend. That is the actual subject of this book.

The publisher and the author accept no liability for what you do with any of it. You are the one standing there. Behave accordingly.

Read This Before You Go

Pack this book, or don't — but read chapters 1 through 5 before you leave. They are short and they are the ones that decide how your weekend goes. Everything from chapter 6 onward is reference. You will not memorise it and you are not supposed to. You are supposed to know roughly what is in there and be able to find it again at eleven at night with a torch in your teeth.

The book runs in four movements.

Chapters 1 to 4 are the frame: what will actually happen, the only theory you need, the rule about consent that makes all of it work, and how to tell in three seconds who to ask. This part is not optional. A person who skips it will spend Friday night asking the wrong people the wrong way and conclude that the book doesn't work.

Chapters 5 to 9 are the toolbox — the approach, the tests, the inductions, the convincers, the deepeners. These are the parts that go in any order and combine

with anything. Learn three of them properly rather than twelve badly.

Chapters 10 to 12 are the numbers. One person, a small circle, and a proper twenty-minute show at a fire. This is what you came for, and it is why the toolbox comes first.

Chapters 13 to 16 are the way back: anchors that last, waking people up completely every single time, everything that can go wrong and what to say when it does, and what remains on Monday.

Two conventions run through the whole book.

Anything you actually say out loud is introduced by **Say it exactly like this:** and set apart from the text. It is written to be said, not read — the rhythm is part of how it works, and the sentences are built the way they are for reasons explained in chapter 2. You can change the words once you understand why they are in that order. Before that, don't.

Anything in *(brackets and italics)* is a stage direction. It tells you where to stand, what to do with your hands, and how long to wait. The timings are exact on purpose. When it says three seconds, two will not do the same thing.

One last thing before you go. Most of what makes this work is not in the wording. It is in asking properly, picking the right person, and being genuinely willing to stop. The wording is the easy part, which is why it is the part everyone else writes books about.

(Yes, including this one. The difference is that this one tells you.)

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Chapter 1 — Two Minutes Before You Start

Two in the morning, north field, third row of tents behind the food trucks. The generator behind the crêpe stand is still running. The second stage is still leaking bass across four hundred metres of wet grass, which means every sentence anyone says has to be said twice, and the second time louder.

A woman in a yellow rain jacket is bent over an empty beer crate with her right hand flat on the lid. She is pushing. She is pushing hard enough that her right shoulder has come up level with her ear and her hair has dropped forward into the beam of somebody's head torch. Her arm is shaking. The hand does not come off the crate.

Twelve people stand around her in a loose ring. Not an audience — nobody arranged them, nobody sold them anything. They were three separate groups sharing a fire six minutes ago and now they are one ring, because a ring is what people make when something is happening in the middle. Two of them are holding half-litre cups they have forgotten about. One man on the left has his phone up and is filming, and has been filming since about four seconds after it started.

Forty seconds before this, she was standing with her cup in her hand telling me that this sort of thing has never worked on her, not once, not at the fair when she was fifteen, not at her cousin's wedding.

(No, she is not asleep. Nobody in this book is ever asleep. She is wide awake, she can hear the bass, she knows exactly where her tent is, and if her friend called her name right now she would turn around.)

I took her wrist. I put her palm on the crate lid while I was still talking, because the sentence goes on top of the movement and not after it. I told her to press down. Then I told her to press harder, and that the harder she pressed, the more she would start to notice how much that hand wanted to stay exactly where it was. Nothing in there was a promise. Nothing in there could be caught out. Her arm did the rest, and everyone in the ring watched her arm do it.

The ring makes a noise when it goes. It is not applause, it is a short flat sound, half laugh and half swearing, and it is the reason you will keep doing this.

Then I put two fingers on the back of her wrist, told her to take one breath and shake the hand out, and it was hers again. Ten seconds later she was holding her cup and telling the ring what it had felt like, and getting it slightly wrong, which they always do.

Three people said "do me next." Two of them had been drinking since four in the afternoon and were not going to be asked anything by me that night — chapter 3 explains why that is a craft decision and not a moral one. The third was a quiet man of about thirty with a wool hat who had said nothing the whole time, and he turned out to be the best subject of the weekend.

That is the scene. Now the part the scene does not show.

Before the woman in the yellow jacket, I had asked eleven people that night. Five said yes. Of those five, one did something visible enough that the person next to them noticed, two felt something real that nobody else in the ring could see, one did nothing at all, and one did that. Two hours of walking around a field, on a good night, in decent weather, sober, with a book's worth of practice behind me.

If that ratio disappoints you, put the book down now, because it does not get better, and everything in the next three hundred pages is built on top of it.

1.1 What This Is

This is a field manual for tonight.

Not for your development as a practitioner. Not for a career. For the eleven hours between when the sun goes down on Friday and when you give up and go to bed. You will read it at home or on the train, you will forget most of it, and you will use four things from it while standing on grass with a torch in your teeth.

So it is built to be used standing up. Every technique in this book is a numbered card with the same six fields: what it is, how long it takes, what you need, what has to have happened first, the exact words, and — the field that matters most and that most books leave out — what you say and do when nothing happens. That last field is not an appendix to the technique. On a campsite it is half the technique.

There is nothing here about fees, contracts, venues, riders, lighting, insurance, agents, or how to turn any of this into a job. Not because that work is not real — it

is real and it is hard — but it requires a stage, a contract and a room that goes dark, and you have a beer crate and a head torch. Different book, different reader, different problem.

There is also nothing here about smoking, weight, sleep, pain, confidence, childhood, or anything that stands within shouting distance of the word therapy. If someone at that fire starts telling you about a genuine problem — and at three in the morning, at least once a weekend, someone will — you are the wrong person, in the wrong place, at the wrong hour, with the wrong amount of alcohol in the vicinity. Chapter 15 gives you the sentence that gets you out of that conversation without making them feel dismissed. Learn that sentence. It is worth more than any routine in the book.

And there is nothing here about picking anybody up. No wink, no subtext, no "of course, if things develop". This book is for making twelve people laugh and one person say "that was properly strange", and that is the whole ambition. If you were hoping otherwise, the field will tell you before I do: people around a fire read intention about four times faster than they read technique, and the moment they read yours, you are the guy they warn each other about on Saturday.

Theory gets exactly one chapter. Chapter 2, about twenty minutes of your life, enough that you understand why the sentences are built the way they are and can repair one when it breaks in your mouth. After that it is hands.

1.2 The Honest Numbers

Here is the arithmetic. Learn it before you learn a single word of script.

Of ten people you ask cold, about four say yes.

Of ten you ask after the ring has already watched you run one number, seven to eight say yes.

That gap is the most useful thing in this chapter, and it is not an excuse for the four. It is a running order. The first number of the evening is the expensive one: you are asking a stranger to hand you thirty seconds of her dignity on the word of a man she met forty seconds ago, with nothing to look at but your face. Once one person has stood there with her hand welded to a beer crate and walked away laughing, you have stopped selling. You are the thing that already happened, and everyone after her is agreeing to a thing rather than to you. So spend your worst hour first, on purpose, and stop reading the early refusals as a verdict — they are the entry fee for the rate you get at one in the morning. The beginner who packs it in at half eleven packs it in about twenty minutes before the work gets easy.

The strokes and circles behind that four are in chapter 5: forty-one approaches, seventeen yeses. That is the whole evidence base, it is a tally I kept in a notebook with a head torch in my mouth, and it is not a study and I am not going to dress it up as one.

Of ten who say yes and pass the gate: one is outstanding. Everything, immediately, deeply. Arm rigid, eyes closed, name forgotten, still talking about it two days later. This is the person your evening is

actually about.

Three respond partially — but visibly. The hand gets heavy but does not lock. The arm drifts up four centimetres and stops. The eyelids flutter and open. They will tell you afterwards that it was "weird, but I could have stopped it", and they are telling the truth. These people are not failures. Half of them go further on a second attempt an hour later, and all of them are why the ring stays standing there.

Four feel something small, and real, and completely invisible from the outside. The hand is a shade heavier than a hand has any business being. The arm is not stuck, but leaving it where it is feels easy and lifting it feels like an argument. Nobody in the ring sees anything at all, so nobody in the ring reacts, so the moment passes with no noise on it. She noticed. She will tell you so about thirty seconds later, quietly, usually starting with "that was weird, though". This is the biggest group in the book — four out of every ten yeses — and it is the group beginners write off as failures, because a beginner counts with the ring's eyes instead of the volunteer's. Do not count that way. Ask her what she noticed, believe her, and write it down as a yes. These are the people who come back an hour later when the fire has burned down and ask you to do it again, and the second attempt is where a good part of them turn visible.

Two show essentially nothing. You will run a clean, correct, well-delivered test on them and their hand will just sit there like a hand.

Those numbers assume you asked properly — chapter 5 — and that you only counted people who passed the

sober-enough gate in chapter 3. Count the drunk ones and the numbers do not just get worse, the evening gets ugly in a way that is hard to reverse.

This is a distribution, not an error rate. That distinction is the entire reason this chapter exists.

Suggestibility varies between people roughly the way flexibility varies. Put thirty adults in a room and ask them to touch their toes: two go flat-palmed to the floor without warming up, most get somewhere between the shin and the ankle, and three cannot get past the knee and never will, and nobody in that room concludes that the instructor is a fraud. Nobody demands a better toe-touching technique. It is simply how the trait is spread.

(No, the ones who go deepest are not the gullible ones. That folk theory has it exactly backwards. In my experience the excellent subjects are disproportionately the people with vivid imaginations and long attention spans — musicians, readers, people who get lost in things. The stubborn ones are usually the ones who cannot stop monitoring themselves, which is a skill, not a defect.)

The same person also varies from night to night. Cold, tired, hungry, needing the toilet, standing next to an ex, standing next to a boss, having just had an argument in the queue for the showers — any of it moves someone two steps down the ladder. A person who was outstanding on Friday can be wood on Sunday. That is not you losing your touch. That is Sunday.

If somebody tells you their hit rate is much better than this, ask them how they count. Almost always the answer is that they only count people who already walked forward at a show — a crowd that has pre-filtered itself twice, once by buying a ticket for that kind of evening and once by standing up in front of four hundred people. Of course those numbers look better. You do not have that crowd. You have a field.

My own worst night: nine approaches, four polite yeses, and not one visible response all evening. I went back to the tent convinced I had lost whatever it was. It was the opening night of the festival, everyone was in transit between the gate and the main stage, and not one of those nine people had ten seconds of attention to give me. The technique was fine. The timing was idiotic. Chapter 4 is about not making that mistake.

1.3 What The Distribution Means For Your Evening

Read the numbers again and then read what follows from them, because this is where most beginners go wrong and it is not a subtle error.

You are not looking for the perfect technique. You are looking for the right person.

Everything changes once you accept that. The beginner's instinct, when a hand does not stick, is to go home and find a better script — a stronger induction, a cleverer wording, the version the good ones supposedly use. That instinct is a trap, and it costs people entire seasons. The gap between an adequate technique and a brilliant one is small. The gap between a partial

responder and an excellent one is enormous. You improve your evening far more by asking six more people than by polishing one more sentence.

Four practical consequences:

Volume is the skill. Your scarce resource is approaches, not talent. Twenty approaches on a Saturday night will beat two approaches and four hours of rehearsal, at every level of ability, including mine. *(No, you are not a natural, and neither am I. There is no such thing. There is a queue, and you work it.)*

The exit matters more than the entrance. Do the arithmetic: ask ten people cold, six of them say no, and of the four who say yes, one does nothing at all. That is seven walks away from something that did not work for every ten people you speak to. If each of those exits is awkward, you will stop after two. This is exactly why every card in this book ends with "If it doesn't come" — a way out that costs the volunteer nothing and costs you nothing, that never sounds like "you failed" and never sounds like "let's start again".

Test early, test cheap. Never invest ten minutes before you know what you are holding. The openers in chapter 6 exist to tell you within forty seconds whether this person is worth the next five minutes. Forty seconds is a cheap thing to lose. Ten minutes in front of a ring of people, with nothing happening, is not.

When you find the outstanding one, do not spend her on a party trick. This is the mistake I see most often in people who have got past the first two. They finally find the one-in-ten, they do a hand stick,

everyone cheers, and then they let her wander off to find her friends. That person is the spine of everything in chapters 11 and 12. Handle her accordingly.

And the arithmetic scales up in exactly the way you would expect. If you want twelve people sitting on a log for the campfire set in chapter 12, you need to have asked around sixteen — and that number only holds because by then the fire has watched you run something. Build the same twelve out of a cold field and it is thirty approaches. Of those twelve on the log, expect one or two who will carry the whole set, four who are visibly in it, and six who will do nothing beyond laugh in the right places. Which is fine — a set built for two carriers and ten laughers is a set that works. A set that requires all twelve to respond is a set that has never survived contact with a field.

Last consequence, and it is about you and not about them. Do not take a no personally, and do not take a yes as evidence that you are good. Both readings are the same error: treating a distribution as a verdict on you. On the night I described at the start of this chapter I was neither brilliant at 02:00 nor useless at 23:20. I was the same operator with the same twelve sentences, standing in front of different nervous systems.

1.4 The One Rule

Everything in this book rests on one sentence, and here it is:

Nobody under hypnosis does anything they would flatly refuse to do awake — and you never go anywhere near testing that.

Both halves are load-bearing, and the second half is the one that gets dropped.

The first half is a description of how the thing actually works. The critical mind gets quiet, not absent. Suggestions that fit — this is a game, it is funny, I am among friends, nothing bad happens here — go through easily. Suggestions that cut against something the person genuinely holds do not go through, they wake the person up, and the wake-up is abrupt and unpleasant and visible to everyone standing around. *(Nothing gets switched off. There is no off. The moment anything actually matters, the critical mind is back at full strength and slightly annoyed.)*

The second half is a rule of conduct, and it exists because people read the first half as a licence. It is not a licence. It is a description of a boundary you are never going to walk up to and prod, partly because that is how people get hurt and partly because you do not have reliable knowledge of where that boundary sits in a stranger you met eleven minutes ago at a fire.

In practice, this is what it looks like:

Your suggestions stay in the register of funny *to her*, never funny *about her*. She is in on it. The ring is laughing with her and she can hear the difference from where she is standing, because everyone can always hear the difference. The second the laugh changes flavour, you have lost her and you have lost the ring, and no amount of "come on, it's just a laugh" gets either of them back.

Nothing about her body beyond hand, wrist and shoulder. Nothing about her relationships, her friends,

her ex, her job, or anything she mentioned in the last hour that you could be clever with. Nothing that would be embarrassing to watch back — remember the man with the phone. That phone is at this point simply a fact of the environment, and it turns every choice you make into something that exists on Sunday.

And the tell that you have crossed it: she goes quiet and does it anyway. Compliance is not consent, and it looks nothing like a good response. A good response looks loose and slightly amused. Compliance looks small. When someone follows your instruction and their face goes flat, you are finished — you bring them all the way back, properly, right then. Chapter 14 tells you how, and chapter 14 applies whether the evening was a triumph or a mess.

The last reason this rule sits at the front of the book rather than in an appendix: a campsite has no stage edge, no security barrier and no exit. The woman in the yellow jacket is sleeping thirty-five metres from my tent for the next two nights. Her friends are in the tent next to her. Everything in this book is designed on the assumption that you will still have to walk past these people, sober, at nine in the morning, in a queue for coffee.

1.5 What You Will Be Able To Do By Sunday

Stated flatly, and deliberately on the low side. If it reads modestly, that is because it is what actually happens, and I would rather you be pleasantly surprised on Saturday than betrayed on Friday.

You will be able to walk up to a group of strangers and ask, in under ten seconds, in a way that produces either a clean yes or a clean no and leaves you standing there comfortably either way.

You will be able to tell, within about forty seconds and without embarrassing anybody, whether the person in front of you is worth another five minutes.

You will be able to run two or three tests where something visible and undeniable happens to somebody's hand or arm — on about four out of ten of the people who say yes. Not most of them. Four.

You will be able to take one person, maybe two over a weekend, into something they will afterwards describe as "not like being asleep, but I honestly could not be bothered to move".

You will be able to bring everyone back cleanly, every single time, including the ones where you are fairly sure nothing happened at all. This one is not optional and it is not a matter of degree.

And once, probably badly, you will hold a circle of six to eight people for about fifteen minutes and get away with it.

What you will not be able to do by Sunday: a forty-five minute set. Produce the excellent response on demand, in front of a specific person, because they asked you to. Make a poor responder into a good one by trying harder — that door only opens from the inside, and pushing on it is the single most common way beginners wreck an evening.

One more honest figure to plan around: expect roughly two hours of actual approaching to produce one thing that people retell to their friends. Two hours of walking, asking, being turned down, being interrupted by someone's mate wanting to know if it is like the telly. One story. That is a good rate, and if you get two you had a very good night.

1.6 How To Use This Book

Sixteen chapters, arranged as a ladder: one person, then a small circle, then a crowd.

Chapters 1–4 are the frame and the gate. Read these before you go, at home, sober. Chapter 3 is the only chapter in the book with no technique in it at all, and it is the one chapter I will tell you outright is not optional: it is the sober-enough test, how you ask, how you build in a real way out, and who you never touch. Chapter 4 teaches you to read a camp — who says yes, who you skip, and the three-second scan.

Chapters 5–9 are the toolbox. The approach, the openers and suggestibility tests, rapid inductions that work without a chair, convincers that make it undeniable, and deepeners that survive a bass line at eleven o'clock. These are parts, not performances. Do not try to perform chapter 6. Chapter 6 is a screwdriver.

Chapters 10–12 are the numbers. One on one, then the small circle of three to eight, then the campfire show for ten to thirty people — twenty minutes, no stage, no microphone, no lighting, worked out in the exact order it goes in. These are the chapters people will remember you for. They are also the

chapters that will fall apart if you skip the toolbox, because a routine is just a sequence of tools with a joke on top.

Chapters 13–16 are the long tail. Anchors that are still there on Saturday and how honest to be about the ones that are not. Waking up — read chapter 14 before you use anything from this book, not after. Full troubleshooting: no reaction, faked reaction, the drunk, the angry boyfriend, the crowd turning, the abreaction. And what to keep and what to throw away when the weekend is over.

Two registers run through the book and they are never mixed. One on one you are beside the person: permissive, unhurried, "you can", "let it", nothing forced. In the show you are shorter and firmer: "Sleep." "Down." "Eyes closed." Both are legitimate in their own place, and both are ridiculous in the other. A man who uses show-voice on one nervous woman by a fire is not a hypnotist, he is a problem. Chapter 2 explains why the firmer register is fair in a circle: because everyone in the circle knows it is a game, and the group is the witness.

The back matter has every routine compressed onto pocket cards. Photograph them. Your phone at a festival is a torch, a clock and a card deck, and at two in the morning you are not going to scroll through prose.

If you have exactly one evening to prepare and no more, read four chapters: 3, 5, 6, 14. The gate, the approach, the openers, the wake-up. That is about fifty minutes and it is enough to have a real Friday.

Last thing. Do not memorise the scripts word for word in your tent and then recite them. Learn the shape — where the true part goes, where the bridge goes, where you leave the gap for them to fill. The exact words in this book are exact because somebody has to write something down, not because they are magic. Chapter 2 tells you which parts you can move and which parts break if you touch them.

When It Goes Wrong

A first night fails in three ways, and only three. I have done all of them, one of them repeatedly.

One: you ask nobody.

This is the most common by an enormous margin, and it does not feel like failure while it is happening — it feels like preparation. You walk the site. You find a fire. The group looks good but they are mid-conversation, so you will wait for a gap. The gap does not come, so you get another beer. Now that group has broken up, so you look for another fire, and the next one has a guitar, which is worse. By half past one you have rehearsed the approach eleven times in your head, spoken to nobody, and decided that this festival has the wrong crowd.

The fix is a number decided before you leave your tent, not a feeling arrived at in the field. Three approaches before midnight, regardless of how they go. Say out loud, to yourself, that the first two are supposed to be bad — they are the cost of the third, and you are paying it deliberately. If you need an easier start, go to the group where somebody has already asked you what

you do, because that group has already opened the door and you are only walking through it.

Two: you ask the wrong person.

Two versions, and both of them arrive disguised as luck.

The first is the loud volunteer. He has heard what you are doing, he wants in, he is telling everyone he is extremely suggestible, and he has been drinking since the afternoon. He feels like a gift and he is a trap: he will respond unreliably, remember it wrong, tell people a version of it that did not happen, and he cannot give you a clean yes because he cannot hold the question long enough to answer it. Chapter 3 gives you the test — can she ask you a clear question and still have the answer thirty seconds later — and the polite way to leave him with his dignity.

The second is the one who is being volunteered. Her friends push her forward, everyone is laughing, she is laughing too. The tell is the timing of her yes: it arrives after she looks at her friends, not before. The fix takes three seconds. Ask her directly, one question, and then let the silence sit — properly sit, three seconds, not two. If her friends fill the silence for her, you have your answer, and the answer is no. Turn it into a joke about the friends and move on. Nobody has lost anything.

Three: you do not stop when nothing comes.

Forty seconds in, the hand is not heavy, the arm is not stuck, and instead of leaving, you push. You repeat the line louder. You add a third test. You start saying things like "just relax", "you're thinking too much", "you're not letting yourself". Every one of those

sentences transfers the problem onto her, in front of a ring of people, and she will feel it land.

The damage is not that one attempt failed. The damage is that eleven people have now watched a woman being told she is doing it wrong, and for the rest of that night, at that fire, nobody is volunteering for anything. You did not lose one subject. You lost the field.

The fix is a hard stop agreed with yourself in advance: one test, one repeat, then out. No third attempt, ever, in the same conversation. The exit line lives at the bottom of every card in this book, and it always does the same job — it gives her a flattering reason for the non-response, it costs her nothing, and it leaves the door open for later. Something in the shape of: that is the analytical version, you check everything before you let it happen, which is the harder type to work with and the more interesting one. Then you hand her back her cup and talk about something else, and forty minutes later, when her guard is down and the fire has burned lower, she will very often ask you to try again.

Three approaches. One stop rule. Get those two things right on Friday and the worst thing that happens is that eleven people forget you asked.

Chapter 2 — The Only Theory You Need

Twenty to two in the morning. The girl on the bench has had her arm out over the fire for about forty seconds and it has not moved. Her friend leans across, cups a hand next to your ear so the bass doesn't eat it, and asks the only question anybody ever asks at a campsite:

Is she actually under, or is she just going along with it?

That question is this chapter. The honest answer — the one nobody puts on a book cover — is *probably both, in a mix that changes every fifteen seconds, and your job is to notice which way it is leaning right now.*

Everything else you need before tonight fits into four ideas. Expectation does most of the work. Narrow attention plus a lazy checking reflex does the rest. What you see is part response and part play, and you must be able to tell them apart. And the person in front of you keeps her judgement the entire time — dimmed, not switched off.

That is the theory. The rest of the book is hands.

2.1 Expectation Is the Engine

What somebody expects to experience, they are more likely to experience. Not always, not on schedule, but reliably enough that the whole craft stands on it.

That is not a trick sitting on top of the mechanism. It *is* the mechanism. Nothing travels from you into her. You do not push a state across the air. You set up a situation in which a particular experience is the obvious thing to have, and then you get out of its way. *(No, you are not putting an idea into anybody. There is nothing to put and no slot to put it in.)*

At a festival this is handed to you for free, and most beginners spend it in the first eight seconds without noticing.

Here is what you were given. Every person around that fire has already seen stage hypnosis. On television, on a phone screen, at a school assembly, at a wedding where somebody's uncle barked at a row of chairs. They arrive pre-loaded with a picture of what this is, what it looks like, and what it feels like to be in it. They know there is a moment where the eyes close. They know the arm can get stuck. They know the volunteer is meant to be surprised afterwards. You did not build any of that and you do not have to. You inherit it.

So the work is not persuasion. The work is not spending it.

Expectation gets spent by hedging. It gets spent by explaining. It gets spent every time you say *let's try*, *this might not work on you*, *I'm still learning this*, *don't worry if nothing happens*. Every one of those sentences is honest and every one of them is expensive. You are telling her that the outcome is in doubt, and she will politely take that on board and hold it in her hand while you work.

Expectation is protected by treating the result as a matter of scheduling rather than a matter of chance. Not *I hope your hand gets stuck*, but *give it about ten seconds*. Not *see if you can feel anything*, but *tell me when it starts*. You are not lying and you are not promising. You are speaking as though the thing is on its way, which is a statement about your calendar, not about her nervous system.

And the counterweight, because I am not going to let you walk off with only the good half: expectation is a tailwind, not an engine you own. Roughly half the people you ask will say no before you finish the sentence. Of the ones who say yes, a good number will produce something small and slightly disappointing, and a few will do something that stops the conversation dead. That distribution does not change because you believe harder. That is not failure. That is the arithmetic, and Chapter 1 gave you the real numbers.

2.2 The Expectation Loan

Fifteen seconds of framing that borrows the picture she is already carrying. Run it before the first opener of the night with anybody who has not seen you work.

ROUTINE 2.2 — The Expectation Loan

What it is A short frame that borrows the television version she already has in her head, then shrinks it to fit a bench.
How long 15 seconds
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite None — this runs in front of everything else in this book,
after the consent question in Chapter 3.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(First line as a question you already know the answer to. Chin down, not up.)*
>
> *"You've seen one of these on television. Big stage, row of chairs, guy in the shiny jacket."*
>
> *(Wait for the nod. Everybody nods. Two seconds. Don't fill it.)*
>
> *"Same craft, much smaller. No stage, no chairs, and you stay sitting exactly where you are. If you want out at any point you say stop, and we're done — no explanation, no questions."*
>
> *(Straight into the opener. No gap. Do not ask "shall we?" — you already asked, in Chapter 3, and asking twice takes the answer back.)*

If it doesn't come If she says she's never seen it, drop the reference and use the group: "Then you get the clean version. Hands out, palms up." If she says it's fake, take that as the offer it is: "Good. Then you're the one who gets to check." Never defend the craft. Somebody who wants to argue is not a volunteer, she's an audience, and audiences are useful.

2.3 Narrow Attention, Low Checking

Two conditions do the heavy lifting, and both are cheap at three in the morning.

The first is narrow attention. One thing in the middle of the frame and nothing competing with it — her own hand, the flame, your voice, a count. Attention is not mystical. It is just what she is currently spending her processing on, and while it is on her palm it is not on

the eleven other things it could be on.

The second is a lowered checking threshold. Everybody runs a background process that tests incoming claims against the world. It never stops. But it can run late, and it can run lazy, and when it does, a statement that would normally be inspected gets waved through and only audited afterwards. That is the whole business. Not belief, not gullibility, not a switch — a delay in the audit.

A festival lowers that threshold in four ways, and none of them are your doing.

Tiredness. She has been on her feet for sixteen hours. The machinery that argues with propositions is expensive to run and it has been running since Thursday. At two in the morning it is happy to accept things provisionally. This is the single biggest reason a campsite beats a living room.

Rhythm. There has been a beat going since the afternoon. Everybody's breathing and movement has been organised around it for hours without anybody deciding to. You did not build that metronome and you can talk on it for free — clauses landing on the beat, pauses on the gap. In a quiet room you have to construct that. Here it is ambient.

Group permission. This is the one people underestimate. On the meadow, everybody is already doing something slightly ridiculous. There is a man in a bathrobe. Somebody is asleep in a wheelbarrow. The social cost of being silly, which in ordinary life is the main thing preventing anyone from responding to you at all, has dropped to about nothing. Nobody has a

professional face to protect out here. That is not pressure — pressure is the bad version and Chapter 4 tells you how to spot it. This is permission.

Darkness and a fire. Fewer objects in view, one bright thing to look at, and a legitimate reason to stare at it that requires no explanation.

Compare that with the same person, same suggestion, eleven in the morning, sober, in a dentist's waiting room, with a colleague sitting two chairs away. Same words, same technique, a fraction of the yield. Not because she changed. Because her reputation is in the room, the light is flat, and nothing is tired.

Now the honest cost, because the meadow takes as well as gives. It is loud, it is cold at four, and it is interruptible. Somebody will walk through the middle of your best moment with a crate under each arm and a genuine question about tent pegs. The festival gives you attention cheaply and takes stability away. Everything in this book is built short because of that trade.

And one line before you get ideas: tired is your ally, drunk is not. Chapter 3 turns that into a rule you do not get to bend, and it is the shortest chapter in the book for a reason.

2.4 Compliance Versus Trance

This is the section that separates people who can do this from people who can perform an impression of it.

Some of what you see tonight will be genuine response — she has stopped monitoring herself, the arm is doing something she is not directing, and afterwards she will

describe it in language she has to hunt for. Some of what you see will be a person playing along, because it is fun, because the group is watching, because saying yes and then producing the expected result is easier and more enjoyable than the alternative.

Both are completely fine at a festival. Nobody is being defrauded. She came to a field to have a night, and playing along *is* having a night. *(Nobody goes under. There is no under, and there is no line you cross to get there.)*

But you have to know which one you are holding, for two practical reasons. It decides how far you can take the routine, and it decides how you bring her back.

Here is how you read it.

Latency. This is the most reliable tell. Genuine response is slow and slightly stupid. You give the suggestion and nothing happens for somewhere between a quarter of a second and two full seconds, and *then* the arm starts, and it starts unevenly — a twitch, a stall, a bit more. Compliance answers on the cue, clean, on time, like a stage direction. If the response arrives exactly when you'd want it to, you are probably being helped.

Micro-movement. A genuinely stiff arm is not still. It has tremor in it, it drifts, the fingers do not all agree with each other, and the height changes by a centimetre or two over half a minute. A helpful arm is held out like a shelf, dead steady, because holding something steady is what a person does when they are holding it on purpose.

The face. Look for eyelid flutter, a jaw that has gone slack in a way nobody chooses, a swallow that arrives late, an eye that waters without any emotion attached to it. Compliance keeps the face managed: small smiles, an eyebrow at a friend, and above all a quick glance at *your* face to see how it is going.

Where the eyes go. The single most useful thing on the list. Someone who is playing along looks at you for scoring. Someone who has dropped into it looks at nothing in particular, or at the fire, or at the middle distance about a metre past her own hand.

Coming back. Watch the fifteen seconds after. A compliant volunteer snaps back instantly and comments on it — *that was so weird, right?* — because she never left the conversation. The other one takes ten to twenty seconds to reassemble: blinks a lot, looks around the circle to find out where everybody went, and often says nothing at all for a while.

Three things about this list before you go and use it as a lie detector, which is exactly what you will want to do.

It is a spectrum, not two boxes. Most of what you see is a mixture, and the mixture moves inside a single routine. Someone starts out being polite and ends up somewhere else entirely, and someone else does the reverse when a friend shouts her name.

You will be wrong. I have been wrong in both directions and so will you. I have written someone off as a good sport and then had her sit down twenty minutes later and describe, accurately, the moment she stopped being able to find her arm. I have also run a full convincer sequence on somebody who was, it

turned out, doing a very committed impression of her cousin.

And never, ever say it out loud. *You're faking* is the one sentence that ends the evening — for her, for the circle, and for the four people who were about to volunteer. If you decide it is mostly play, you adjust silently: keep it short, keep it funny, do not stack a convincer on top of it, and wake her up anyway. If you decide it is mostly the other thing, you slow down, you stop introducing surprises, and you give the full reorientation from Chapter 14 with the buffer intact.

2.5 The Unwatched Second

The cheapest diagnostic in the book. You are not testing her honesty. You are testing whether the response needs an audience to keep existing.

ROUTINE 2.5 — The Unwatched Second

What it is A four-second look away that shows you whether a response
is holding on its own or being held for your benefit.
How long 6 seconds
What you need Nothing. One other person within earshot helps.
Prerequisite Any hand or arm response currently running — a stuck hand,
a heavy arm, a grip that won't open.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Quietly, to her, while the arm is still out. Half a step lower than your speaking voice.)*
>
> *"You don't have to hold that. It can stay exactly where it is without you."*

(Now turn forty-five degrees away and talk to whoever is nearest, about something completely ordinary. Four seconds — not two. Two isn't long enough to be alone in.)

"Somebody put another log on before this thing goes out."

(Look back. Don't announce it. Don't look at the arm first — look at her face, then the arm.)

What you are reading in those four seconds: if the arm drops the moment your attention leaves, you are holding a good sport. If it stays and drifts and shakes slightly, you are holding the other thing. If she turns her head to keep watching *you* while it stays up, she is scoring herself against your face, which is the most common result and sits exactly in the middle.

If it doesn't come If the arm falls and she laughs, take it and keep her dignity intact: "Good — that's it telling us it's finished. Shake it out." Then move to something shorter and lighter. Never explain that you were testing her, never repeat the test on the same person the same night, and do not run the routine again to "get a better result". You got the result.

2.6 Dimmed, Not Switched Off

Now the correction this book exists to make, because everything else in it depends on you having taken it seriously.

You cannot remove somebody's judgement. There is no state in which a person becomes a passenger in her own body, no depth at which she hands over the steering, no wording that makes her a puppet. It does

not exist, it has never existed, and every claim to the contrary is either marketing or somebody who has confused a cooperative volunteer with a conquered one.

What actually happens is smaller and more useful. The critical faculty is dimmed. It runs later, it runs lazier, and for a while it stops auditing small claims that do not matter — the weight of an arm, the number that went missing, whether the beer can is heavier than it was. Meanwhile the parts that matter stay online the whole time. She knows where she is. She knows who you are. She knows what she will not do, and she will not do it.

You can verify this the ugly way, and I do not recommend it: give someone a suggestion that crosses a line she genuinely cares about, and she will not comply. What usually happens is worse than non-compliance — the state collapses on the spot, she opens her eyes, and you have lost the circle. Which is the practical reason, quite apart from the obvious one, that you never go near it.

The second thing that follows is about pressure. If you push, you get resistance — not because she is difficult, but because that is what people do when they are pushed. Permissive language is not politeness and it is not softness. It is engineering. *You can* and *you don't have to* and *nothing to force* work because they remove the thing there is to push against. There is no wall to lean on, so nobody leans.

Which means the honest description of what you are doing tonight is this: you are not overcoming anybody. You are offering a frame, and some people step into it.

(You did not take anything from her. She lent you ninety seconds of her attention and she can take it back at any point without asking.)

That is also why *no* is so common and so cheap. There is nothing to overcome, so there is nothing to try harder at.

2.7 Why the Sentences Are Built the Way They Are

Everything spoken in this book is built on two load-bearing ideas.

One: claim nothing checkable. If a sentence makes a prediction that can be tested against her actual experience in the next four seconds, then it can lose. And when it loses, you have not just failed at one suggestion — you have told her that this entire activity is a series of claims to be evaluated, and now she will evaluate all of them.

Two: make her do the work. Anything she generates herself arrives without resistance, because there is nothing to resist. Your job is to leave precisely shaped gaps and let her fill them.

Take the sentence everybody starts with:

> *"Your arm is getting heavy."*

Two faults, both fatal. It is a checkable prediction — if the arm is not heavy, you were wrong out loud. And it is addressed to the awake, alert, socially competent adult who now has a job to do: verify the claim. Verification is exactly the mode you do not want, and you just handed her the assignment.

Now build the same idea properly. Seven layers. I will add one at a time and let the sentence grow.

1 — Pacing truth. Start with what her body has no choice but to agree with. Not an opinion, not a compliment. Facts available to her in this second.

> *"Your arm's out in front of you and the fire's on the right side of your face."*

2 — The conjunction bridge. *And as* carries the true half onto the half that cannot be checked. Nothing is being argued. One thing is simply riding on another.

> *"...and as you keep it there..."*

3 — Permission instead of command. This removes the performance pressure, which is the main thing killing responses on a campsite. Nobody can relax while being graded.

> *"...you don't have to hold it up on purpose..."*

4 — Delegation. Address the arm, not the woman. This is not a poetic flourish. It solves a real problem: she cannot simultaneously let go and consciously steer. Give the task to a body part and the steering problem disappears.

> *"...your arm can do that part without you..."*

5 — Presupposition and an awareness verb. Here is the hinge of the whole craft. Do not say the thing will happen. Say she may *notice* the thing happening. The doubt now sits on the noticing, never on the event.

> *"...and you might start to notice how heavy it gets."*

6 — The gap. Delete the actor and delete the yardstick. Heavy compared to what? Which part? She will fill both in herself, and whatever she puts there will fit perfectly, because she made it to measure.

> *"Some part of you already knows how to do this."*

7 — The seal. An illusory choice with no losing branch. Whatever occurs is inside the frame, so nothing counts as it not working.

> *"Whether it locks up completely or just gets too heavy to be worth bothering with — either way, you'll feel it."*

Assembled, spoken at about the pace you would read a road sign:

> *"Your arm's out in front of you and the fire's on the right side of your face — and as you keep it there, you don't have to hold it up on purpose. Your arm can do that part without you. And you might start to notice how heavy it gets. Some part of you already knows how to do this. Whether it locks up completely or just gets too heavy to be worth bothering with — either way, you'll feel it."*

Now the comparison the whole chapter was walking towards.

"Your arm is getting heavy" is a bet you can lose. *"You might start to notice how heavy it gets"* cannot be lost, for three separate reasons. The heaviness has been moved into a subordinate clause where it is assumed rather than asserted — grammatically, it is already the case, and the sentence is about something else. The only thing carrying any doubt is the word *might*, and it

is attached to her noticing, so if she notices nothing, the sentence was still true. And in between, the word *notice* sends her to go and look at her own forearm, which is the single most effective thing anyone can do to start feeling something in a forearm. She goes looking, she finds something, and she found it herself. There is nothing there for her to disagree with.

Three warnings, because this is where people get clever and stop being effective.

Do not stack all seven layers into every sentence. Two or three per sentence, mixed and rotated. Seven at once produces the thing that gives the whole craft a bad name — *you might begin to allow yourself to perhaps notice how some part of you can already start to maybe let that arm become heavier in its own way* — which does not sound skilled, it sounds like a man hiding behind grammar. She will hear evasion, and evasion reads as doubt.

Delivery carries at least as much as construction. Speak the true half at normal conversational speed. Drop half a step in pitch at the bridge. Slow down across the last clause. Then stop for two full seconds and do not fill them. The pause is where she does the work, and beginners talk straight through it because silence at a campfire feels like failure. It is not. It is the only part of the sentence that belongs to her.

And the honest limit: *(The words are not magic. They are only better odds.)* Say this to someone who came over specifically to prove you wrong, or say it too fast, or say it while checking whether it is working, and it does nothing at all.

2.8 What Nobody Honestly Knows

A short list, because the alternative is pretending.

Nobody selling you a course knows whether "trance" is one thing or a convenient word for several different things that happen to look similar from the outside. Neither do I.

Nobody can tell you why the same person responds beautifully on Friday and produces nothing on Saturday with the same wording from the same voice. It happens constantly.

Nobody can measure, at a campsite, in the dark, what proportion of a given response is response and what proportion is play. Section 2.4 gives you the best guesses available. They are guesses.

Nobody can tell you how long anything lasts. Anchors decay, the rate varies enormously between people, and Chapter 13 says so out loud instead of promising you a weekend-long trigger.

And nobody can tell you why some people cry. It happens perhaps once in thirty. The honest answer is that you do not know what it means, and Chapter 14 gives you what to do rather than what to think about it.

One working rule falls out of all this, and it is the most practical sentence in the chapter: **never explain to a volunteer what happened inside her head.** You do not know. Describe what you saw instead. *Your arm stayed up about forty seconds and you stopped blinking*. That is all you actually have, it is always true, and it is far more impressive than a theory.

When It Goes Wrong

Two mistakes come out of this chapter specifically. They are mirror images, and beginners tend to make one hard and then overcorrect into the other by Sunday.

Mistake one: deciding it's all just people playing along. This one arrives about three nights in, usually after catching somebody obviously performing, and it feels like sophistication. It is not. What follows is a hypnotist who treats every volunteer as an actor: skips the wake-up because there is nothing to wake up from, pushes a routine two steps further than the state supports because it is only a game anyway, and gets loose about consent because consent seems academic when everyone is pretending.

The antidote is arithmetic, not belief. You cannot tell reliably which one you have — Section 2.4 gave you tells, not certainty. So work out the cost of being wrong in each direction. Treat genuine response as play: you push too far, you leave somebody sitting by a fire at four in the morning feeling strange and unattended, and you have no idea it happened. Treat play as genuine response: you slow down slightly and spend forty extra seconds on a wake-up that was not needed. That is the entire downside. Take the cheap error every time, on every volunteer, including the one you are certain about.

Mistake two: deciding expectation does everything, so a failure means you didn't sell it hard enough. This is the more common one and it is uglier to watch. The suggestion doesn't land, the

beginner's stomach drops in front of nine people, and he does the natural thing: repeats it louder, adds emphasis, adds a promise, tells her to concentrate, tells her she's *nearly there*, and finally starts negotiating with the volunteer about whether her own arm is heavy.

Watch what he has done. There was nothing to resist a minute ago. Now there is a man leaning in, and she has something to lean against. Reactance manufactured out of nothing, in public, by the person who had the advantage.

The antidote is a rule with no exceptions: when it does not come, you take the exit and you take it immediately. Never louder, never a second attempt with more force. The suggestion that quietly fails costs you nothing — she will not even file it as an event. The second attempt with the volume up costs you the volunteer, the circle, and the next four people watching.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Normal speaking voice. Same volume as before. Do not sound relieved and do not sound disappointed.)*
>
> *"Good — that's plenty for that one. Shake the hand out."*
>
> *(Then turn to somebody else and start a different sentence. Two seconds. The turn is what closes it, not the words.)*

Then let it go. There is another fire forty metres away and the night is four hours long.

Chapter 3 — The Festival Consent Gate

Half past one, the small stage has shut down, and a girl is being pushed towards you by three of her friends. She is laughing. She is also braced backwards against the hand between her shoulder blades, and her feet are pointing at the beer tent. Somebody shouts your name. Somebody else has a phone up already.

This is the moment the whole book turns on. Not the induction. Not the routine. This.

You have about four seconds to decide whether the next twenty minutes are a game she plays or a thing that happens to her, and the difference between those two evenings is not talent, timing or wording. It is one question, asked out loud, and what you do with the answer.

Everything that follows is craft. I am not going to lecture you about ethics, because ethics do not survive contact with a Saturday night and the people who need lecturing do not buy books. So here is the working version instead: **a clean yes makes the evening better, not just safer.** A volunteer who chose this tracks you, follows the wording, remembers it in the morning and tells the story back to fifteen people in a way that gets you three more volunteers. A volunteer who got pushed in stares at her friends the whole time, laughs at the wrong moments, gives you nothing, and by Sunday the version circulating the campsite is that some guy was doing something to her by the fire. Same technique. Same skill. Different gate.

Two more things before the work starts.

First, the gate is the one place in this book where you use the language architecture by **subtracting** from it. Everywhere else you build on truth, bridge into permission, and seal the ending so that nothing counts as failure. At the gate you keep exactly three of those layers — the pacing truth she can verify with her own body, the permission that makes refusing cheap, and the seal that means neither outcome is a loss. And you deliberately leave out the rest: no embedded commands, no presupposition, no comparatives without a yardstick, no open blanks for her to fill. A yes you engineered out of somebody is not a yes you can use, and — this is the practical part — if the group hears you talking her into it, the evening is finished before the induction. They will not be able to say why. They will just stop laughing.

Second, nothing at the gate promises her anything. Not one gate sentence tells her what she is going to feel. You do not know what she is going to feel. Say what is true, offer what is optional, and leave the rest of the evening to do its own work.

3.1 Sober Enough To Say Yes

Alcohol is everywhere on a campsite. So is everything else. You are not the police of the field and you will not be counting anybody's drinks, so put the moral version away and use the working version:

Somebody who is visibly drunk or visibly loaded is not a volunteer. Not tonight. Not for

money, not for the story, not because his friends are chanting.

Four reasons, all of them practical.

They respond unreliably. A drunk volunteer flips between two useless states with nothing in between: enormous overplayed reaction that everybody can see is theatre, or a flat nothing while he tries to remember what you asked. You cannot calibrate against that. Every test you run gives you a false reading, so every decision you make afterwards is built on noise.

They remember it wrong. Not vaguely — wrong. He will tell four people on Sunday that you made him do a thing you never mentioned. His version is the version the campsite gets, because you will not be there to correct it, and you would not want to be the man correcting it.

They cannot hold a frame. Every routine in this book asks somebody to keep one instruction alive for ninety seconds. That is the whole trick. Working memory is the first thing drink takes.

The audience reads the scene differently. This is the one people underestimate. Sober volunteer plus you equals a game. Drunk volunteer plus you equals something being done to somebody. The crowd does not analyse it, they just feel it, and the feeling arrives about eight seconds before anybody could explain why.

(No, drink does not make anybody easier to hypnotize. That is a stage myth, and on a campsite it is the expensive one — it costs people their evening and it costs you your reputation in a field where everybody talks to everybody.)

One beer is not the gate. Two is not the gate. I am not measuring intake, I am measuring whether the person in front of me can track a conversation. Here is how you find out in twenty seconds without turning it into an interrogation.

ROUTINE 3.1 — The Two Questions

What it is A twenty-second check that tells you whether she can track and hold a conversation — the one capacity every routine in this book needs.
How long 20 seconds
What you need Nothing. Your own name.
Prerequisite None. This runs before anything else, every time.

Stand at forty-five degrees, not square on. Say your name early and put one small useless fact next to it, so there is something to hold.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"I'm Felix, by the way. Fourth field, the green tent with the broken pole."*
>
> *(Talk about something else for thirty seconds. The band, the queue, the mud, whatever is in front of you. Do not signpost the test.)*
>
> *"Where's your tent, then — can you point at it?"*
>
> *(Listen for one sentence with a direction in it. Not a paragraph. Not a story about the man in the next tent.)*
>
> *"And what did I say my name was?"*

That is the whole test. Two questions.

The first one — where is your tent — checks orientation, and it is dual-use: if the evening runs long

you will want that answer anyway. The second one — my name — checks whether anything you said thirty seconds ago is still in there. If she asks you something back, unprompted, and then keeps hold of the answer, that is the strongest single sign you get all night.

The written answers matter less than these tells, and the tells override the answers:

• Her eyes do not settle on you. They land, slide, land again.

• She repeats herself inside one minute and does not notice.

• Sentences start and do not land anywhere.

• She asks you the same question twice.

• Her friends are supplying her words. Watch for this one. It looks like a group being funny and it is actually somebody else driving.

• She is using a guy-line, a tent pole or a person to stand up.

Any two of those and it is a no, regardless of how cheerfully she answers.

If it doesn't come Do not say "you're too drunk". Never say it. You have just told forty people what you think of their friend, in front of her, and now the group is against you and she is humiliated. Postpone, take the blame yourself, and give her a job. A person who gets turned away holding a job does not feel rejected.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Not now — this one needs you sharper than the tent does. Tomorrow, four o'clock, by the coffee*

van, and I'll do it properly."

(Then, immediately, without a gap:)

"Meanwhile stand here, you'll see it better from this side than anyone. Watch her hands, not her face."

You have moved her from candidate to witness in one sentence. Nobody lost anything. Tomorrow at four she will actually turn up about one time in three, which is a better rate than anything else in this book.

Honest arithmetic: of the people who tell me yes on a Friday, I turn down roughly one in six at this gate. On a Saturday after midnight it is closer to one in three. That is not squeamishness, that is the same reason I do not do close-up work in the rain.

3.2 The Ask, Out Loud

Ask. Out loud. In front of at least two people who are not you.

It has to be audible, and this is where most people quietly cheat, because a mumbled question is easier for everybody and it feels smoother. It is not smoother. Three reasons it has to carry:

Witnesses. Not for your protection in any formal sense — forget all that, it is not what this book is about. For the room's. The people watching need to have heard the question and the answer, because they are the ones who decide, in the first ten seconds, what kind of scene this is. If they did not hear a question, they will supply their own explanation, and their

explanation will be worse than the truth.

Her own voice. She says yes out loud, she hears herself say it, and it becomes hers instead of yours. Self-generated commitment does not produce resistance in the way an imposed one does. This is the same principle running underneath every routine in the book, deployed thirty seconds early.

Your own honesty check. If you find yourself lowering your voice for the ask, you already know something is off. That instinct is good data. Follow it.

Three versions. Which one you use depends on who is standing where.

ROUTINE 3.2 — The Ask, One On One

What it is The audible, refusable question, for a single person with two or three of her people nearby.
How long 12 seconds
What you need Two witnesses within earshot. Not one.
Prerequisite Passed 3.1.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Right — do you want to try something? It's about two minutes, it's a hand thing, you stay standing, you keep your drink."*
>
> *(Pause. Three seconds. Let her actually answer. Do not fill it.)*
>
> *"Some people get a lot out of it, some people get a bit, either way you'll have something to tell them about."*

Look at what that last line does not say. It does not tell her her hand will lock. It does not tell her she will be

amazed. It gives both outcomes a landing spot, so there is no version of the next two minutes that counts as her failing at something. That is the seal, and at the gate it is the only piece of architecture you need.

Note the specifics: **two minutes, a hand thing, standing, keep your drink.** Vague invitations get vague answers. "Do you want to be hypnotized" gets you either a wall or a performance, because that sentence carries every myth she has ever seen on television. "Do you want to try something, two minutes, hand thing" is a size she can price.

If it doesn't come If what comes back is a shrug, a "dunno", or a yes aimed at somebody else's face instead of yours, you have half an answer. Shrink the offer once, out loud, and take whatever that produces.

> *"Even smaller version, then — ten seconds, you don't move, I don't touch you. Or we skip it, honestly no odds to me."*

Ten seconds and no contact is an offer almost nobody has to think about. If that gets a shrug as well, it is a no. Close it with the exit at the end of this section and go.

ROUTINE 3.3 — The Ask, Inside A Group

What it is The same question, rebuilt for the case where the group has already volunteered her.
How long 15 seconds
What you need The ability to turn your body away from the loud one.
Prerequisite Passed 3.1. Use whenever somebody else answered first.

The tell that you need this version: somebody other than her said yes. A friend shouts "she'll do it", a hand lands between her shoulder blades, she laughs and

looks at *them* rather than at you. Whatever comes out of her mouth in the next four seconds is not an answer, it is social management.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Turn ninety degrees. Put your shoulder between her and the loudest friend. Address her only.)*
>
> *"Ignore this lot for a second. It's your call, not theirs."*
>
> *(Pause. Two seconds.)*
>
> *"If you'd rather not, just say 'not me' and I'll go and pick on him instead."*
>
> *(Point at the loudest friend without looking at him.)*

The escape hatch there is doing real work. You have not just permitted a no, you have made the no *funny* and pointed the group's attention at somebody else in the same breath. She can refuse without losing a single point in front of her people. If a no costs her status, you did not offer a choice, you set a trap.

If it doesn't come If the group answers over her a second time, she is not available tonight — not because she said no, but because nobody can hear her say anything. Take the loud friend instead. Do it cheerfully, in front of everyone, and do not look back at her.

> *"Right, you then. You've been doing all her talking, you can do the work as well."*

The group gets its volunteer, she gets left alone, and neither of those things looks like a refusal. If she wants in afterwards she will tell you herself, in her own voice,

which is the only version you could have used anyway.

ROUTINE 3.4 — The Ask, Over The Music

What it is The audible version when audible is genuinely hard — near a rig, in a crowd, before a set.
How long 20 seconds
What you need Somewhere two steps quieter. Find it first.
Prerequisite Passed 3.1.

Do not shout consent questions into someone's ear at a sound system. Ear-shouting looks like exactly what it looks like, and half of it will not arrive anyway.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Two steps out, side by side, both of you facing the same way. Not face to face — face to face at volume reads as pressure.)*
>
> *"Can't do this here, it's too loud. Come two steps this way?"*
>
> *(Wait. If she does not come two steps, that was your answer and it was a no. Nod, smile, gone.)*
>
> *"Right. Two minutes, a hand thing, you stay standing. Yes or no — either's fine, I've got a whole field."*
>
> *(Say the last clause lightly. It is the single most useful sentence in the chapter, because it is true and she can hear that it is true.)*

"I've got a whole field" removes the thing that makes people say yes when they mean no: the sense that refusing will hurt you. Take away that pressure and the yes you get back is worth something.

If it doesn't come If she comes the two steps and then stalls — or if the two steps never happen — that is the end of it, and it is your job to close it, not hers. You never make somebody manufacture a refusal. The same close works for all three versions of the ask.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"All good — it's not for everyone and it's a stupid thing to do sober anyway. Have a good one."*
>
> *(Turn first. You turn away before she does. That is what stops it being a rejection.)*

You turn first. Always. It costs you nothing and it is the whole difference between a person who avoids you all weekend and a person who comes back at two in the morning and asks.

3.5 The Exit

The exit line is not a disclaimer. It is a working part, and it goes in **before** the induction, every single time.

ROUTINE 3.5 — The Exit Line

What it is The sentence that gives her a stop button, spoken before anything starts and meant literally.
How long 6 seconds
What you need Nothing. Say it while looking at her.
Prerequisite A yes from 3.2, 3.3 or 3.4.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"One thing first. Say stop and we're finished immediately — no explanation, and nothing gets weird."*

Six seconds. Learn it word for word. Do not improve it, do not soften it, do not add a joke on the end. It goes in after the yes and before you touch anything.

Why before the induction and not during. Because afterwards is too late for it to do the work it is there to do. The line has two jobs and only one of them is the obvious one. The obvious job is that she can stop. The other job — the one that makes your evening better — is that a person holding a stop button relaxes. She does not have to keep a portion of her attention in reserve, watching you, checking whether this is still fine. That reserved attention is the exact resource every routine in this book needs. Hand her the button and she stops guarding the door, because you already told her it was open.

(Nobody is under your control at any point. Nobody ever is. That is precisely why the line works — you are describing a door that was never locked, and describing it costs you nothing at all.)

Why you have to mean it. Sooner or later somebody uses it. Maybe once every fifteen or twenty runs, in my experience, and almost never for the reason you expect — usually it is her phone, or her friend has wandered off, or she suddenly needs the toilet.

What matters is the half second afterwards.

If you hesitate — if you finish the sentence you were on, if you say "hang on, we're nearly at the good bit", if your face does the thing — you have just demonstrated to every person watching that the stop button is decorative. And they were listening. They heard you

offer it. Now they have watched you not honour it. You will not get another volunteer from that group tonight, and they will not tell you why, and if you ask they will say they are just tired.

So: **stop mid-word.** Not at the end of the sentence, mid-word. It should look slightly abrupt. The abruptness is the proof.

And you do not get to interpret. If it sounds like stop, it is stop. Somebody laughing "stop, oh my god, stop" is a stop. Deal with it as a stop, close it down cleanly, and if she was joking she will tell you within three seconds — and then you ask again, fresh, from the top, out loud. That costs you fifteen seconds. Guessing wrong costs you the field.

Stopping does not mean walking away. Whatever state she is in — and after ninety seconds it is usually less than you think, but never assume — you bring her all the way back before you do anything else.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Done. Eyes open, take a breath — that's it, all the way back. Have a stretch."*
>
> *(Wait until she has actually moved her feet. Watch her feet, not her face.)*
>
> *"You're good. That's finished."*

Ends on a statement. Never on a question. "Are you all right?" invites somebody to go looking for a reason not to be.

If it doesn't come If she does not react to the exit line at all — no nod, no eye movement, nothing — she was not listening, and you do not have a yes yet. Do not

proceed. Say it once more, shorter, and get a visible acknowledgement before you move.

"Look at me a sec. Say stop, we're finished, no questions. Yeah?"

(Wait for the nod. Then start.)

3.6 Hesitation Inside A Yes, And The Other Thing

This is the most important distinction in the chapter, and the one that separates people who do this well from people who eventually cause somebody a bad night.

Hesitation inside a yes may be taken up and carried forward. A no is never talked around.

They are not on a spectrum. They sound similar for about two seconds and then they diverge completely, and here is how you tell them apart in real time.

Hesitation inside a yes is long, curious and stationary. It asks questions. It stays. It wants information, reassurance or cover in front of friends. Her feet stay pointed at you. It gets *longer* when you give it room.

Sounds like:

• "I don't know, am I even hypnotizable?"

• "Wait — what happens if it works?"

• "Does it hurt? What do I have to do?"

• "I'm rubbish at this stuff, I've done it before and nothing happened."

• "Can she do it too? I'll do it if she does it."

• "Not in front of him." *(That is a yes with a condition attached. Move two metres and the condition is met.)*

Every one of those is a request for something you can actually supply: information, a smaller size, a witness, a different spot, a face-saving frame. Supply it, then ask again, once, cleanly.

A real no is short, complete and mobile. It does not ask anything. It is the same length or shorter the second time. Her feet turn. Her shoulders square off towards somewhere else. She reaches for her drink or her phone as a way of being busy.

Sounds like:

• "Nah, I'm good."

• "Not my thing."

• "Maybe later." *(Said while turning. Said while turning it is a no. Said while standing still with eye contact it is a yes with a timestamp.)*

• Nothing at all — just a smile and a small step back.

• "I don't like that stuff."

The step back is the clearest signal on the list and it is the one people talk themselves out of seeing.

The test that resolves it in three seconds: hand her an easy exit and watch what she does with it.

> *"Honestly, no is completely fine — half this field's said no tonight."*

If she takes the exit, it was a no and you just saved both of you a bad ten minutes. If she does *not* take it — if she stays, if she asks another question, if she says "no, no, I want to, I'm just—" — that is a yes with a wobble on it, and the wobble is workable. Give her the missing piece and go.

This works because you made refusing free. A person will only decline into an easy exit if they mean it. That is why you build the exit generously and say it like you would be relieved.

The one-ask rule. You ask once. Once per person, per night. If you have asked twice, you are not persuading, you are wearing somebody down, and the group can hear the difference even when you cannot.

The exception is not an exception: if she comes back to you, that is *her* ask, and it counts. This happens more than you would think. About one in five of my Friday refusals turn up on Saturday having watched somebody else do it, and they are the best volunteers of the weekend, because they arrived with their own yes already in hand.

Most people will say no. That is not failure, that is the arithmetic. On a good night I get maybe five yes out of twelve asks, and the four flat noes cost me nothing except four minutes and the small ache in the ego that you will stop noticing by the second evening.

3.7 The People You Do Not Ask

Short list. No exceptions on it, no clever reading of it, and every item is on it for a practical reason as well as an obvious one.

Minors. They are at festivals. Really at festivals, in numbers, often with wristbands you are not looking at, and at one in the morning by firelight in a hoodie everybody is twenty-three. So the rule is not "check ID", the rule is: **if you are guessing, you already have your answer.** Skip. A hesitation about somebody's age is a decision that has already been made and is waiting for you to catch up.

If you genuinely cannot tell and the situation is otherwise clean, ask flat, without apology, before anything else:

> *"Before anything — you're over eighteen?"*

Flat question, flat answer. An embarrassed question gets a lie, because an embarrassed question tells the person that the wrong answer will disappoint you. And if a group goes quiet when you ask it, that silence is the answer.

Anyone visibly drunk or loaded. Section 3.1. Not tonight. Tomorrow at four, by the coffee van.

Anyone you are talking to alone, at night. Not "anyone alone" — anyone alone *at night*, away from her people, out of anybody's sightline. Not because something would happen. Because the situation itself is wrong shape, and it is wrong shape for her before it is inconvenient for you: a stranger in the dark asking to try something with her hands is a bad experience

regardless of your intentions, and your intentions are invisible from outside your own head. The fix is easy and takes no argument. Wait until she is back with people, or do it in daylight, or do it where four people can see you and none of them are yours. The daytime version of this work is better anyway, and almost nobody does it.

Anyone who names a condition. Epilepsy or seizures of any kind. Heart or circulatory trouble. Psychosis, bipolar, anything currently being treated. An acute trauma — a recent death, an assault, a bad month. Pregnancy. You are not qualified to weigh any of that, and weighing it is not your job. You are not treating anybody, you are doing a bit by a fire; the moment medical information enters the conversation, the correct move is out.

Anybody who is only there because the group is pushing. Covered by Routine 3.3, but the deep version is this: watch who is answering. If she has not spoken for herself once in the last thirty seconds, she has not agreed to anything, no matter what noise came out of the huddle.

Now the hard part of that list. You need the health information, and you cannot turn the evening into an intake interview. Nobody wants to announce their epilepsy to eight people at a campfire. Nobody is going to tell a stranger that her mother died in April. And you never, under any circumstances, ask a woman whether she is pregnant.

So you build one sentence that lets her opt out **without disclosing anything at all.** That is the entire design problem, and this is the solution.

ROUTINE 3.7 — The One-Sentence Health Question

What it is A single sentence that lets somebody decline for a medical reason without naming the reason, in front of friends, at no social cost.
How long 8 seconds
What you need Nothing. Say it once, at normal volume, and move on.
Prerequisite Passed 3.1, yes received, exit line given.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"One thing and then we start. If there's anything going on with you — heart, seizures, anything you're being treated for, anything you'd rather not sit through tonight — you don't have to tell me what it is. Just say 'not tonight' and we'll do something else instead."*
>
> *(Then look away. Genuinely look away — at the fire, at your hands. Give her three seconds of not being watched.)*

Read what that sentence is doing. It names two conditions specifically, so she knows the category. It leaves the category open at the end — *anything you'd rather not sit through* — which quietly covers the ones you must not name out loud: the pregnancy, the diagnosis, the April. It hands her a ready-made phrase, "not tonight", which is short enough to say and gives away nothing. And it promises an alternative, so opting out does not end her evening.

Then you look away, because being watched while deciding whether to disclose is the pressure you were trying to remove.

If "not tonight" comes back, you take it at face value, instantly, with no follow-up question. Not one. Not even a kind one.

> *"Course. Come and watch this one, it's better from over here anyway."*

If it doesn't come If she starts telling you the details — the diagnosis, the medication, the story — do not take the conversation. It is not yours and you cannot do anything with it. Thank her, close the gate, stay friendly, and stay out.

> *"Appreciate you saying. Let's not do this one then — genuinely not the night for it. You want a hand carrying those?"*

Change the subject with a job in it. It works every time and it lets her keep her dignity intact.

3.8 Touch

Announced. Minimal. Hand, wrist, shoulder. Nothing else.

Not the face. Not the neck. Not the back of the head, not the torso, not the legs, not the small of the back, not "just steadying her". If a technique you have read somewhere needs any of those, it is not in this book and it is not for a campsite.

The announcement matters as much as the limit. Touch that arrives without warning makes a person startle, and startle is the opposite of what every routine here is built on. Touch you announced one beat early is just part of the choreography.

ROUTINE 3.8 — Asking For The Wrist

What it is The permission question for physical contact, built so that "no" is the easy answer.
How long 5 seconds
What you need Your own hand, palm up.
Prerequisite Yes received. Exit line given. 3.7 clear.

Say it exactly like this:

(Hold your own hand out, palm up, at her waist height. Not reaching towards her. Just there.)

"I'll need to take your wrist for this one — all right? Or you can put your hand on mine instead, works the same."

Two things. First, the alternative. When you offer a second option that is equally good, refusing the first one stops being a refusal and becomes a preference, and preferences are cheap to express. Second, the palm-up hand at waist height. Your hand is already out, so she is not being reached for; and if she wants to opt in she does it by moving her own hand, which means the first contact is hers.

If it is a shoulder rather than a wrist, the same shape:

"I'm going to put a hand on your shoulder for this — say if you'd rather I didn't, it works either way."

(And no, you are not taking over anything. You are running a game she agreed to play, and she can stop it faster than you can start it.)

If it doesn't come If she pulls back, hesitates, or says nothing — treat it as a no and switch to the no-contact version immediately, without commenting on it.

Do not say "it's fine, I won't". That names the thing and makes it a moment.

> *"Easier without, actually. Hands out in front of you, palms up, like you're holding two mugs."*

Never comment on a refusal of touch. Absorb it into the choreography and carry on as if that had been the plan. Half the routines in this book run with no contact at all, and the ones that need contact need less of it than you think.

3.9 Phones And The People Watching

Somebody is filming. Always. By the time you are three sentences in there will be two phones up, and one of them belongs to the friend who thinks this is hilarious.

You are not going to stop it and you should not try — a man telling people to put their phones away at a festival looks like a man with something to hide. What you do instead is put one line in early that changes what happens to the footage afterwards.

ROUTINE 3.9 — The Camera Line

What it is One sentence, said to the audience before you start, that puts the volunteer in charge of the footage.
How long 7 seconds
What you need Enough volume that the phone-holders hear it.
Prerequisite Yes received. Say it to the group, not to her.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(To the group, over her head, loud enough to carry. Not to her.)*

"Film it if you want — but it's hers, not yours. Anything she doesn't like, it comes off your phone tonight. Deal?"

(Wait for the nod from at least one phone-holder. You need one visible agreement, not all of them.)

Said to the group, not to her, because she should not have to be the one who asks. It costs the filmers nothing to agree in advance, and agreeing in advance is what makes the request stick afterwards, when it would otherwise be awkward.

If it doesn't come If somebody argues — "it's a public field, mate" — do not debate it. Debating hands him the stage. Take the smallest possible version and move on.

"Fair enough. Face out of it then, yeah? Cheers."

Then start. He will usually put the phone down within a minute anyway, because the argument was the interesting part for him.

Now the other half, which matters more: what you do when she has done something she would rather forty people had not seen. It happens. It is usually harmless — a noise, a wobble, a thing she said. The rule is simple and you have about four seconds to apply it.

ROUTINE 3.10 — The Cover

What it is Moving the embarrassment off the volunteer and onto yourself, immediately, in one line.
How long 10 seconds
What you need Speed. This works at four seconds and not at forty.
Prerequisite Something landed awkwardly.

Say it exactly like this:

(To the group, quick, flat, slightly bored. Boredom is the tool. Anything you sound bored about stops being an event.)

"That one's on me — I set that up badly, she did exactly what I asked."

(Then to her, quieter, without leaning in:)

"You're good. That was mine."

(Then, immediately, to the group — give them the next thing to look at:)

"Right — who's got a lighter?"

Three moves in ten seconds: take the blame, tell her she is fine, redirect attention. The redirect is the load-bearing one. A crowd that has been handed a new thing to look at forgets the old thing within about fifteen seconds; a crowd left staring will build a story out of it.

If somebody has it on video and she looks uncomfortable, you ask once, lightly, without touching the phone and without making a scene of it:

"Delete that one, yeah? Cheers."

Light, immediate, and then you look away as if it is already done. Ninety per cent of the time it is done. The other ten per cent, let it go — pressing turns a small thing into the story of the night, which is the exact outcome you were trying to prevent.

If it doesn't come If she is already upset before you can cover — stop the routine entirely. Do not finish it, do not rescue it with a bigger effect. Close, walk her two steps out of the circle, and hand her

back to her own people with something to do.

"We're done, that's the end of that. Come on — out of the smoke for a sec."

(Then to her friends, not to her:)

"She's fine. Get her a chip."

3.11 The Friend Who Steps In

He arrives. Not maybe, not if you are unlucky — he arrives, at some point this weekend, and he is usually a decent person doing a decent thing badly. Big lad, half a step too close, hand on your shoulder or hers: "Oi — what are you doing to her?"

Here is what you do, and it is the opposite of what your body will want to do.

You stop immediately. You do not explain. You agree with him.

Explaining is the trap. Everything you might say — she said yes, it is only a game, she is not even under, ask her yourself — is true, and every one of those sentences is an argument, and an argument in front of a group with drink in it is a thing that grows. Also, and this is the part worth sitting with: he is right. He is right in principle. He came over because a friend of his was in a situation he could not read, and that is exactly what a good friend is for. You want more of him in the world, not fewer.

ROUTINE 3.11 — Standing Down

What it is The full stop when somebody intervenes: stop, agree, reorient the volunteer, hand her over.
How long 25 seconds
What you need Your hands visible and off everybody.
Prerequisite Somebody stepped in.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Hands off her, mid-word, before you say anything. Step back one full pace. Hands where he can see them.)*
>
> *"You're right. We're done."*
>
> *(To her, immediately — you still have to bring her all the way back. Stopping is not walking away.)*
>
> *"Eyes open, breathe, have a stretch — that's you, all the way back. Feet moving. Good."*
>
> *(Wait for her to actually shift her weight. Do not skip this because he is standing there.)*
>
> *"That's finished. She's all yours, mate."*
>
> *(Then leave. Do not wait to be thanked, do not wait for her to defend you, do not deliver a closing line.)*

Twenty-five seconds, four moves, no case made for the defence.

What happens next, nine times out of ten: she tells him herself. "He asked me, I said yes, it was funny." That is the sentence that fixes it, and it only works if it comes from her — the identical sentence out of your mouth sounds like a man managing a situation. So shut up and let her say it. If she says it, he will usually apologise

to you, and then he will want a go himself. About a third of my best volunteers arrived by this exact route.

The other one in ten, he stays annoyed. Fine. He is allowed to be. Leave.

If it doesn't come If he does not calm down, or he gets closer, or somebody else joins him — nothing you say improves it. Take the loss out loud so the watching group hears you take it, and go.

"My fault, mate. Have a good one."

Walk. Not backwards, not slowly, not with a parting look. Two hundred metres, different fire, different people, and do not come back to that circle tonight. The evening cost you one routine. It could have cost you a weekend.

When It Goes Wrong

Four ways the gate actually gets broken. Not hypothetical ones — these are the four that happen.

1. She was drunker than she looked, and it lands mid-routine.

Somewhere around the second minute, it arrives: she goes glassy, or she overplays wildly, or a friend leans in and tells you she has had a rough one. Your test passed and it was still wrong. That happens; alcohol arrives in steps, not slopes, and she may have been fine when you asked her and not fine ninety seconds later.

Do not finish. Do not try to land the effect first. Close it as a completed thing rather than an abort — the group should not be able to tell the difference — then hand

her over with a specific instruction, because vague handovers get dropped.

"And that's the one. Eyes open, big breath, have a stretch — all the way back, feet moving. Nice one, you were good at that."

(To the nearest sober-looking friend, by name if you have it:)

"Do me a favour, get her sat down and get some water in her. She pointed her tent out to me twenty minutes ago, ask her again now — if she can't do it this time, she's not walking back on her own."

That is why you asked where her tent is. The question was never only a test; it is the one piece of information the end of the evening actually needs, and asking it twice tells you which direction the last twenty minutes went.

2. Somebody used the exit and you were slow.

You did not hear it over the rig, or you heard it and finished your sentence. Either way, there is a gap, and she noticed, and so did the group.

Do not explain the gap. Do not say you did not hear. Name it in one clause, take it, and then do not ask her again tonight — not later, not when she is laughing again, not if she offers.

"You said stop and I kept going. That's on me. We're finished — eyes open, breathe, have a stretch. Yeah, all the way back."

(To the group, plainly, no drama:)

"My fault, not hers."

Then give the evening ten minutes before you approach anybody else in that circle. The group needs to watch you be normal for a bit.

3. A condition or a real reaction surfaces mid-routine.

She says "I get seizures sometimes" halfway through. Or she starts crying properly — not the laughing-crying, the other one. Or something in the wording has clearly landed on a real thing.

You do not chase content. You do not ask what came up. You do not help. The single most damaging instinct at this moment is the kind one — the urge to make it better, to talk it through, to be useful. You are by a fire with a stranger and you are not equipped, and the version of "helping" available to you here mostly consists of digging.

Exit upwards, reorient hard, hand off, stay out.

"We're going to stop there. Open your eyes — look at me, look at the fire, look at your hands. Feel the ground. That's it. Say your name for me."

(A name said out loud is the fastest reorientation you have. Then:)

"That's finished, all of it. You did nothing wrong and nothing's carrying on. Who came with you?"

Then you get her friend, physically, and you leave her with them. If she wants to tell you what it was, she can — you listen, you do not interpret, you do not offer to fix it, and you do not do a second routine on her this

weekend under any circumstances, including if she asks you to.

4. Somebody lied at the gate.

She said eighteen and a friend mentions afterwards that she is sixteen. He said he was fine and his mate tells you about the medication on Sunday morning. She said she had had two.

You will find out afterwards, which means the only useful decisions are the ones about what happens next. Do not argue with the person who told you, and do not go back to the volunteer to check. Both of those are about making yourself feel better.

> *"Right — thanks for telling me. That's the last one with her, then."*

And that is it. No speech, no apology tour, no explaining yourself to the campsite. You close the door on that person for the rest of the weekend, quietly, and you do not make her the subject of a conversation she is not in.

Then the part that actually reduces the odds next time: the lie almost always got through because the gate was rushed, and the gate was rushed because the group was hot and you did not want to lose the moment. That is the real failure and it is a timing failure, not a judgement failure. Twenty seconds. Two questions. One audible ask.

(No, she cannot get stuck, and nobody has ever got stuck. What she can get is embarrassed in front of forty people who all have phones — and that, not the trance, is the risk you are actually managing.)

The gate costs you about ninety seconds per volunteer and roughly one volunteer in six. Pay it. The alternative is not a shorter evening, it is a different one.

Chapter 4 — Reading The Camp

Half past midnight, third row of tents behind the food trucks, nine people around a fire somebody built too big. You have been standing at the edge of the light for three seconds. In those three seconds you already know which one of the nine you want, which two you will not touch tonight, and which one of them has to say yes before any of it matters.

That is the skill. Not the induction. The induction is thirty seconds of memorised words that a fourteen-year-old could learn in an afternoon. Choosing is the part that takes a summer.

Beginners look for the best technique. People who get results look for the right person. A mediocre hand test on someone who wants to play beats a beautiful rapid induction on someone who is standing there to see you fail — and it beats it every night, in every weather, at every hour. If you learn nothing else from this book, learn to spend your first three seconds on the group instead of on your own nerves.

Here is the arithmetic, because nobody else will give it to you. Out of a circle of eight adults at a festival, on an average night, you will find one or two you would happily take, two or three you could take if the first ones decline, and three you skip on sight. On a bad circle: zero. You walk on. Most people will say no, and most of the ones who say yes are people you should not have asked. That is not failure. That is the job.

4.1 The Three-Second Scan

You do not walk up to a group and then figure it out. You figure it out from four metres away, in the dark, before anyone has registered that you exist. Four checkpoints, run in a fixed order, until the order stops being conscious.

ROUTINE 4.1 — The Three-Second Scan

What it is A fixed four-point sweep you run on a group before you speak,
so that you pick a person instead of letting a person pick you.
How long Three seconds. Four if the fire is bright and you are squinting.
What you need Nothing. A position at the edge of the light, not in it.
Prerequisite None. This is the first thing you do at every fire, every time.

Run it exactly in this order:

One: feet. Feet point where attention lives. Feet aimed into the circle mean the person is committed to this group for the next hour. One pair aimed at the path means that person is leaving within ten minutes and does not know it yet. Two pairs of feet aimed at each other, slightly apart from the rest, means a conversation you are not invited into. Feet lie less than faces do — nobody manages their feet.

Two: hands. Open hands, moving while talking, visible on knees or in the air: available. Arms crossed with the fingers tucked flat under the biceps: closed, but that can be temperature, so check whether the shoulders are up around the ears as well. A cup held with both hands in front of the sternum is a shield, and the person holding it is either cold, new to this group,

or wants to be left alone. All three mean: not tonight, not first.

Three: laugh order. Wait for one joke. Somebody will make one within twenty seconds; at a fire they always do. Watch who laughs first, who laughs half a beat late, and who laughs at the person telling it rather than at the thing they said. First laugher: your candidate. Half-a-beat-late laugher: he is watching the group to find out whether it was funny. He is a monitor, not a player, and monitors make expensive volunteers. Laughing-at-the-teller: that is a rivalry, and you do not want to be standing in the middle of it.

Four: the gap. Find the hole in the circle where a body can stand without anyone having to move. If there is a gap, you have a place to be and you may approach. If there is no gap, do not create one — you talk from outside the ring, at the shoulder of the nearest person, and you let them decide whether to open the circle. A stranger who wedges himself into a full circle at night has already made his first bad impression and it is not recoverable.

That is the scan. It is not one second per point; all four land at once, the way you read a room for an empty chair. *(No, this is not intuition. It is a checklist you run fast enough that it feels like intuition. Six weeks of running it slowly is the price.)*

If it doesn't come The scan gives you nothing — closed hands everywhere,
no gap, no laugh in twenty seconds. Then the answer
is the next fire. There are forty of them within
two hundred metres. Walking away costs you nothing
and it costs the group nothing, which is the only
transaction in this book that is free on both sides.

4.2 Who Says Yes

Now the specific signals. Every one of them is a signal about **expectation-readiness** and about **pleasure in imagery** — how ready somebody is for something to happen, and how much they enjoy being inside a picture rather than looking at one from outside. None of them is a signal about weakness. *(Nobody in that circle is weak-minded. There is no such category, there never was, and the people who talk about it are describing their own volunteers badly.)*

The one already leaning in. Before you have said a word, somebody has shifted their weight forward. Leaning costs balance and comfort; it is an advance payment on attention, and he has already made it. People who pay in advance want the thing they are paying for. This is the single most reliable sign in the book, and it is free.

The first to laugh. Laughing first is a small public risk — you commit to something being funny before the room has voted. The person willing to do that is the person in the circle most comfortable being visible before the outcome is known. That is exactly what volunteering costs. He has demonstrated, tonight, in front of these specific people, that he can pay it.

The one who asks a question. "Wait, how does that work?" A question is a request for more contact, and it hands you the frame without you having to take it. There is another thing hidden in it: people who ask questions want to *have* an experience. People who make statements want to *grade* one. Learn to hear the

difference in the first four words, because they sound similar and they behave nothing alike.

The one who has stood on a stage. Band, theatre group, karaoke, DJ set, five-a-side captain, teacher, tour guide, anyone who has been looked at on purpose. They have already discovered that being watched is survivable, so there is no wall to climb first. They also know how to take direction from a stranger without it feeling like a defeat, which is a rarer skill than it sounds and which you will need at second forty of every routine.

The one singing along, loudly, badly. He is already producing an internal experience — melody, lyric, timing — and rendering it in public without waiting for permission. In two minutes you will ask someone to build a picture behind closed eyes in front of their friends. He has been doing exactly that all evening for free.

The one who uses their hands to tell a story. Watch for someone drawing the size of a thing in the air, or placing two invisible objects on an invisible table. That person thinks in pictures and puts them into space automatically. Hand them a balloon and a bucket and they have the raw material before you finish the sentence. This is a working skill, practised daily, and it has nothing to do with being easily led.

Three smaller ones, worth having. The person who repeats a phrase you used thirty seconds ago — they are tracking you closely. The person who remembers a detail you dropped in passing — same, stronger. And the person the group has *already* asked to do something silly tonight, who did it: the price of

being visible in this specific circle has already been paid once, and nobody died.

Stack them. One signal is a maybe. Three signals on the same person is your volunteer, and you stop looking.

4.3 Who You Skip

Skipping is not caution. Skipping is the technique. Every person on this list will cost you the evening, and two of them will cost you more than that.

The one who is too drunk. The gate from Chapter 3 does not soften after midnight, it hardens. On a campsite the tell is rarely the stagger — it is the repetition. He tells you the same sentence twice in two minutes and does not notice. She holds a cup at fifteen degrees off vertical and does not correct it. He needs a shoulder to stand up from a camping chair. Ask him a plain question and see whether the answer survives thirty seconds; if it does not, he is not a volunteer tonight, he is a person you are polite to. This is not prudishness. A drunk volunteer reacts unreliably, remembers badly, cannot give consent that means anything, and — the part nobody writes down — the rest of the circle watches the scene differently the moment they see he is gone. You are no longer a guy doing a trick. You are a guy doing something to their mate.

The quiet one being pushed by the group. The signals are precise: the group says her name before she has said anything herself; two people put hands on her shoulders; she looks at the ground while they nominate

her; she says "fine, whatever." Skip. Her yes is not hers, it belongs to the four people around her, and what you will get is compliance with nothing inside it — a person doing what she thinks she is supposed to do while feeling nothing at all. That reads to the circle either as your failure or as bullying, and both are worse than not starting. If you genuinely want her, wait twenty minutes and ask her alone, quietly, when nobody is looking, and accept a no.

The one who just had a fight. He is sitting one metre further out than the geometry requires. Phone face-up on the knee. Jaw working. Somebody keeps glancing at him. Whatever is running inside him has all the emotional bandwidth already, and you will be building on top of a load you cannot see. At best you get nothing. At worst you get a reaction that has nothing to do with your routine and everything to do with the last hour, in front of nine people, at a fire, at night.

The one obviously waiting for someone. He checks the path. He checks the phone every forty seconds. He is standing when everyone else is sitting. His attention has an appointment, and the appointment will arrive at second seventy of your two-minute routine. Not his fault, not yours, entirely avoidable.

The one who mentions a condition. Anyone who says the words epilepsy, heart, seizures, panic attacks, bipolar, psychosis, "I'm pregnant", or "I had a rough year" is off the list — instantly, without discussion, without a follow-up question and without making it a scene. You say "good to know" in the same tone you

would use for "I don't like mushrooms", and you look at someone else. You do not ask for details. You are not qualified to weigh them and it is not your business.

Anyone who might not be eighteen. At a festival this is genuinely hard to read at night. Wristband colours help at some events, conversation helps everywhere: school, exams, "my mum drove me". One flicker of doubt and the answer is no. There is no version of this where being wrong is survivable.

And the one who wants to prove it doesn't work. He gets his own section, because he is not really a skip — he is a reassignment.

4.4 The One Who Wants To Prove You Wrong

He announces himself. "That stuff doesn't work on me." "I've got a strong mind." "My cousin does this, it's all fake." He says it loudly, to the group, and he watches your face while he says it.

First, tell him apart from his harmless twin. The friendly tester **asks** — "how does that even work?" — and he is a yes waiting to happen. The disprover **states**. That is the whole diagnostic, and it takes four words.

Second: he is not your enemy, and he is not your volunteer either. Do not take him. Not out of fear — out of arithmetic. He has just made a public commitment to nothing happening. For the next ten minutes his standing in this circle depends on defending that position, so his entire attention will sit on monitoring

himself, which is precisely the attention you would need pointing somewhere else. You would be asking a man to relax his grip while his friends watch to see whether he does.

What he is instead: the most valuable non-volunteer at the fire. The group already knows he is the doubter. That means anything he confirms is worth more than anything you say about yourself, because his credibility with them is built on being hard to convince. So you do not argue with him. You hire him.

ROUTINE 4.4 — The Witness

What it is You convert the loudest sceptic into the group's official observer, which keeps him useful and takes his hands off your routine.
How long Twenty seconds.
What you need A spot to point at. Nothing else.
Prerequisite He has declared himself out loud. Do not do this to someone who has merely gone quiet.

Say it exactly like this:

"You think it's rubbish."

(Statement, not question. Mouth closed, no grin. Wait one second and let him have it.)

"Good. Then you're the one I need. Everybody else here wants it to work, which makes them useless as witnesses. Stand here."

(Point at a spot ninety degrees to your volunteer, at her left shoulder — not beside you. He must be looking across the scene, not from behind you.)

"Your job is her hands, not mine. If I push her, you say so out loud. If I talk her into something, you

say so. And if nothing happens, you're the one who tells everyone nothing happened. Can you do that?"

(Wait for the yes. Do not fill the silence. Two seconds of nothing is fine; it is his turn.)

"One more thing — don't help. No nodding, no 'whoa'. Just watch."

Look at what he now has. A role in which being right is possible without being against you. His public position stays intact: he is still the man who is not fooled, and now he is the man who is not fooled *and* has an official function. He also spends the next two minutes looking hard at a pair of hands from ninety degrees, which is sustained close attention with no exit and no audience of his own. A good number of them come round on their own, without anyone winning an argument. *(No, you have not converted him. You have made him useful, which is worth more and costs less.)*

If he does come round later — after two other people have had something happen — he is a different man, no longer defending anything. Then, and only then, you can take him, and it will be the best volunteer of your night.

If it doesn't come He refuses the job, or he keeps narrating over you.
Say: "Fair enough. Then just stand where you are and stay quiet for two minutes. If it's rubbish you'll have two minutes of evidence." Turn your shoulder forty-five degrees away and do not look at him again. If he interrupts a second time, you finish the routine early, cleanly, and you leave the fire. You never fight for a circle. You will not win, and the person

who pays for the fight is your volunteer.

4.5 Configurations

Groups come in shapes, and the shape tells you the move before the people do.

The couple

The trap is obvious once it has bitten you: whoever you do not pick becomes the audience member with the most complicated feelings in the world, standing two feet away. Never solve this by picking the woman by default, and never, ever put your hands on the one whose partner is standing behind them without dealing with the partner first.

The move is to give the other one a job with status. Not "you just watch" — a job.

ROUTINE 4.5 — The Pair Split

What it is A way to run something with one half of a couple while the other half is inside the routine rather than outside it.
How long Fifteen seconds of setup.
What you need Both of them present and not mid-argument.
Prerequisite Neither of them is drunk. Two people means two gates,
not one.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Thirty seconds, both of you in it, different jobs. Which one of you has ever been on a stage — band, theatre, karaoke, anything at all?"*

(One of them will point at the other. That finger is your casting decision: the pointer becomes the watcher, the pointed-at becomes the volunteer. It takes about a second and a half and they do it for you.)

"Perfect. You've got the harder job." (To the watcher.) "Watch her hands and tell me if I push them. You're the referee."

"And you —" (to the volunteer) "— can end this at any second by saying stop. Then we're finished, no reason needed, no discussion."

If it doesn't come Neither has been on a stage, or they both point at themselves: take whoever answered first, the other one referees. If the watching partner's face closes — jaw, arms, a half-step in — you stop before you start: "Actually, better idea —" and turn it into conversation. You never run a routine past a partner's face. Not once, not for a small one.

The six-pack that already knows each other

Six friends who arrived together have fixed roles: a joker, a host, a quiet one, usually a couple. Your problem is the joker. He is not the sceptic — he is the entertainer, and you have just walked into his job. He will sabotage for laughs, cheerfully, without malice, and he will win because it is his crowd.

So hire him. Give him the countdown, or the announcement, or the phone light. Then take your volunteer from somewhere else — specifically from the person who leaned in when you started talking. Never take the joker as your first volunteer even when he

offers, and he will offer. If something happens to the joker, the circle's explanation is instant and unanimous: he is playing along, because that is what he does. If the same thing happens to the quiet-but-willing one at his left, the circle has no explanation available, and that silence is worth more to you than any effect.

The two strangers on a beer bench

The easiest configuration in this entire book, and beginners walk straight past it looking for a crowd. Two people, one bench, no shared history, no roles to defend, no audience to perform for, and — this matters more than it sounds — already seated. Half the logistics of every routine in this book are "get them sitting", and it is done.

The risk is the mirror image: with no audience, nothing holds their attention except you. If you are boring they simply leave, and they should.

ROUTINE 4.6 — The Bench Bridge

What it is An opening for exactly two seated strangers, where one becomes the volunteer and the other becomes an audience of one.
How long Twenty-five seconds.
What you need A bench with space at one end, or the ground.
Prerequisite You are at their eye level before you speak.

(Crouch, or sit on the end of the bench at forty-five degrees. Never stand over two seated strangers in the dark. Standing over people reads as a threat about a second before it reads as an offer, and you do not get that second back.)

Say it exactly like this:

"Can I steal ninety seconds off you two? I do a thing with hands. It's stupid, and it works more often than it has any right to."

(Pause. Let them look at each other. That look is the answer and you will be able to read it.)

"One of you does it, the other one calls it. Who's got the steadier hands?"

(Whoever names the other one is your volunteer's referee. The named one is the volunteer.)

"Ninety seconds and then I'm gone either way. Either something odd happens, or you get ninety seconds of watching a stranger be wrong. Both are a decent deal."

If it doesn't come They look at each other and hesitate, or one says no:
"Fair enough — enjoy the beer." Stand up, leave.
Never a second ask on a bench. Two people on a bench is a two-person space, and a second ask turns it into two against one, which is the exact feeling you are there to avoid producing.

The big fire circle where half of them don't know each other

The hardest shape and the best one. Hard, because there is no single frame: three or four sub-groups, different clocks, different volumes, and the people on the far side genuinely cannot hear you over the fire and the speaker. Best, because a circle of half-strangers *wants* a shared event and has not got one yet. That is a hole in their evening that you can fill.

Do not address the circle. Never, at any point, ask a fire circle for its attention — the request is a promise of a performance, and now you owe eleven people something in the next thirty seconds.

Cut a piece out of it instead.

ROUTINE 4.7 — The Half-Circle Cut

What it is You take four or five adjacent people out of a large ring and run something small for them, with your back turned to the rest.
How long Ten seconds of setup, then whatever routine you chose.
What you need An arc of the circle where you can stand at forty-five
degrees to the fire.
Prerequisite The host has already said yes (4.6 below — do this first).

(Pick the arc where you found your gap. Turn your body so that the rest of the circle is behind your shoulder. Physically excluding them is the point — you are making a small private thing that is visibly not for everyone.)

Say it exactly like this — to one person, not to the arc:

> *"Hold your hands out. Like this, palms down."*
>
> *(Do it yourself while you say it. Do not explain what will happen. Explanation invites evaluation, and you do not want anyone evaluating yet.)*
>
> *Then, to the person beside her, without a pause: "You too."*

That is the whole approach. No announcement, no premise, no "would everyone mind". The rest of the circle will notice by itself the moment those five react

to something, and attention you never asked for is attention you cannot lose.

One piece of geometry, and it is not optional: never take a volunteer whose back is to the fire. You get the light straight in your eyes, and if she sways she sways toward heat. Your volunteer sits or stands with one and a half metres of clear ground behind her and the fire on your side of the pair.

If it doesn't come Two of the five look away or pull their hands back.
Run it with the remaining three and say nothing about the two. Never "come on, everybody" — the moment you recruit out loud you have converted a small private thing into a performance that half the circle has already declined.

The group that has been drinking for six hours

You do not approach them. That is the whole procedure.

You can read it from ten metres. The volume comes in waves with dead flat gaps between. Somebody is horizontal and nobody is checking on him. There are cans on the ground and no one has picked one up in an hour. The conversation has stopped having topics and now consists of names and laughing. Half of them are looking at nothing.

The reasons are practical, not moral. No consent worth the word. No memory of it tomorrow. Reactions that look like reactions and are not. And, reliably, one person who grabs — your arm, your bag, your volunteer — because the part of him that would have

decided not to went off duty at nine.

I have run routines into groups like that. Twice, both in the same summer, both because I wanted the numbers. What I got both times was exactly what I had asked for: noise, a volunteer who could not stand up unaided at the end, and one friend of hers who decided he did not like me. That is not a moral position I am taking. That is a repair bill I paid.

What you do instead: sit down, talk about nothing, drink water, remember the tent. Come back at two in the afternoon, when three of them are sober, slightly embarrassed and profoundly bored. They will say yes then, and it will work, and they will remember it.

4.6 The Host

Every circle has one informal leader. He is not the loudest one. *(No, really — the loudest one is usually the person the host tolerates.)*

Find him by function, not volume:

• People glance at him after they say something, checking.

• He distributes things: wood, seats, beer, the space around the fire.

• When you ask the whole group a question, he is the one who answers.

• He introduces newcomers to the group, which means he has the authority to add people.

• The gear at the centre is his — his chair, his cooler, his speaker.

• He is the one who tells somebody else to shift over so that you can sit.

He is not your volunteer. He is your permission-giver, and this is the single highest-leverage move in the chapter.

Here is why. On a campsite you are a stranger walking into somebody's living room, and the walls happen to be nylon. Approval from the group's own authority converts you from "guy who came over" into "guy who is here" in about four seconds, and there is no other way to buy that. It also solves half your safety problem in one move, because he knows things you cannot possibly know from three seconds of scanning: who has had what, who is nineteen and lying, whose evening went wrong an hour ago, who just had the argument. He will tell you, if you ask him in a way that makes telling you easy.

Host first. Always. Before you look at anybody else, even when the perfect volunteer is standing right there with her hands already out.

ROUTINE 4.8 — The Host's Permission

What it is A twenty-second exchange with the group's informal leader
that gets you a yes, a volunteer and a safety briefing in
one go.
How long Twenty to thirty seconds.
What you need To have identified him correctly. Get this wrong and the
whole thing lands flat.
Prerequisite None. This is the first thing you say at any fire that

isn't yours.

(Stand at his side, forty-five degrees, not in front of him. Hands where he can see them. Speak to him, not to the circle — if you address the circle now you have made him a spectator at his own fire, and he will remember it.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That your fire?"*
>
> *(Wait. It is a yes, or it is "it's Marco's over there" — in which case you thank him and go and find Marco. Cheap question, and it never fails to route you correctly.)*
>
> *"I do hypnosis stuff. Small things, two minutes, nobody ends up looking stupid. I'd like to try one with somebody here, and I'd rather ask you than just start."*
>
> *(Pause. Two full seconds. Let the decision be his and let him feel it being his.)*
>
> *"Two things and then I'll shut up. One: anybody who's had a lot to drink, I don't take — so if I pick someone I shouldn't, just say and I'll pick someone else. Two: any point at all you want it to stop, you say stop and I stop, no discussion, no sulking."*
>
> *(Now, and only now:)*
>
> *"Who here would enjoy this?"*

That last line is the whole routine. Not "can I", which invites a risk assessment. Not "who wants to volunteer", which invites the joker and the drunk.

"Who would enjoy this" makes him a casting director, and he will name somebody — because he has had six hours of information about these people and you have had three seconds. The person he names arrives pre-approved by their own group, which is a completely different animal from a person who nominated himself. In one move you have got permission, a filter, and a volunteer nobody in the circle will resent.

If it doesn't come He says no, or "nah mate, we're just chilling." Answer: "Understood. Have a good one." Leave. Do not negotiate, do not stand there for a second ask, do not come back to the same fire in twenty minutes with the same offer. A no from the host is the cleanest information you will get all night.

Special case: he says "do it on me." He wants to lead by example, which is fine — take him only if he passes the sober test, keep it under sixty seconds, and keep it small. If the host looks foolish, the circle closes, and it closes for the rest of the night.

4.7 The Clock

What works at six in the evening does not work at three in the morning, and the reverse is more true than anyone expects. A realistic raster for one festival day:

10:00–13:00 — the wreckage. Tents are hot, people are horizontal, nobody wants a show and you should not offer one. But this is quietly the best window in the day for one-on-one work with somebody you met last night. Low noise, no audience, and a person with nothing else happening for two hours.

Hand tests, arm heaviness, one small anchor. Nothing involving more than three people.

13:00–17:00 — the window nobody uses. People have eaten, yesterday has worn off, today has not arrived. They are sitting in shade, bored between sets, sober enough to consent and awake enough to care. Groups are stable, faces are visible, and everyone can actually hear you. Your hit rate is higher here than at any other hour by a wide margin. If you run one session per festival day, run it here. The three-in-the-morning version is the one you will tell your friends about. The three-in-the-afternoon version is the one that works.

17:00–20:00 — golden hour. Energy high, attention short, everyone getting ready and drifting toward the stages. Good for approaches and forty-second openers. Bad for anything over three minutes. Use it to plant: do one small thing, do it well, and say "I'll be around later."

20:00–00:00 — the camp is empty. Whoever is left is resting, waiting for somebody, or already too far gone to walk to the stage. Low yield. Either skip it entirely and go and watch a band, or work quietly with the three or four people who stayed behind, which is sometimes the best conversation of the weekend.

00:00–02:00 — the return. Camp refills, fires get built up, moods are elevated and circles are unusually open to strangers. The best window in the day for group work, six to twelve people, high shared mood, low resistance to a shared event. The catch is that the substance load also peaks here. Expect to scan three circles to find one you can use, and expect to skip more

people per circle than at any other hour.

02:00–04:00 — the long warm hours. The people still up are the ones who wanted to be, which is a selection filter working in your favour. Deep one-on-one work is possible here in a way it is not at any other time of day. Two warnings. The drunk ratio is at its worst, and everyone is tired. *(Tired is not the same as suggestible. Tired people fall asleep, and a sleeping volunteer is not a trance, it is a sleeping volunteer with a stiff neck.)* Keep routines under four minutes and wake people fully, every time, no exceptions, especially at this hour with a fire and guy ropes in the dark.

04:00–07:00 — don't. Not for moral reasons. Everyone left is wrecked, sad, or halfway through an emotional conversation you would be interrupting. Two of the three worst evenings I have had at a festival started at about half past four with me thinking there was one more in me.

Then the correction that matters more than the raster: **there are two clocks.** The festival clock, and the group's own clock. A group that pitched their tents at ten at night — fresh, sober, unpacking, excited — is a three-in-the-afternoon group no matter what your phone says. A group that started at nine in the morning is a four-a.m. group by seven in the evening. Read their clock: how many cans are on the ground, is anyone still cooking, is a tent still going up, has that speaker been running longer than a phone battery lasts.

And two free windows most people never notice. The twenty minutes after a group has eaten: full, still, unhurried, everyone seated in a ring by accident. And

the ten minutes after a rain shower stops: people cluster under one awning, sober by circumstance, bored, sheltered, packed close and pleased about it. Both are gifts. Take them.

When It Goes Wrong

You picked wrong and you are twenty seconds in.

The signs are early and specific. His eyes flick to his friends every single time you speak — he is playing to the group, not doing the thing. He answers each instruction with a joke. Or her hands do exactly what you described, correctly, half a second too early: that is not the effect, that is a person performing what she believes is supposed to happen, and it will collapse the moment you ask for something she cannot predict. Or the reverse — nothing at all, and the jaw is set.

Three exits, in order of cost. Learn all three, because you will use all three.

One: the downgrade. Turn the routine into a smaller one that cannot fail. From an induction down to a hand test. From a hand test down to "hold that — good, that's the hard part done." Nobody in the circle knows what you originally intended, so nothing has gone wrong. It only goes wrong when you insist on finishing the thing you announced.

Two: the handoff. Give the wrong person a job and take a right one. *"Actually, you're better placed for the watching job — come here, hold this."* Then, to the arc: "Right. Who else has steady hands?" No one is exposed, nobody is corrected, and the group has a new

object to look at within four seconds.

Three: the stop. "That's it, that's the whole thing." Say it exactly the way you would if it had ended where you planned, then move your body — turn, sit down, pick up your cup. Never announce a failure. Never diagnose your volunteer out loud, and above all never say the word "resisting". Resistance is what people call it when they picked the wrong person and want it to be somebody else's fault.

Two hard rules on top. Never restart on the same person. And never take the same volunteer a second time in one night after a miss, however much they ask — the second attempt drags the first one behind it and everybody in the circle can see the rope.

One separate case, and it is the one that will actually happen to you: mid-routine you realise he is considerably drunker than he looked at the edge of the light. Sober candidates hide it well in three seconds of scanning and stop hiding it at ninety. End inside fifteen seconds, wake him fully and slowly, get him seated with his back against something solid, and hand him to his own people. Do not finish it because you are nearly there. The gate does not fail loudly at the start; it fails quietly, in the middle, which is exactly why it is a gate and not a formality.

You will pick wrong roughly one time in five in your first summer, and about one in ten after that. It does not go to zero. Last August I ran an arm-heaviness on a friendly, wide-awake, hands-talking man who gave me every signal in section 4.2, and who turned out to be waiting for his girlfriend to come back from the medical tent. He had not mentioned it. There was no

signal to read and I could not have seen it. I got thirty seconds in, saw his eyes go to the path for the third time, and stopped.

That was the correct call, and it still cost him nothing, which is the only standard that counts.

Chapter 5 — The Approach

Half past eleven, the third row of tents behind the small stage, six people on camping chairs around a gas lantern. Two of them have seen you standing there. You have maybe eight seconds before the group decides what you are: someone who wants a light, someone who is lost, someone selling something, or someone worth turning the chairs for. After those eight seconds the decision has been made and you are working against it instead of with it.

So the opening is not a conversation. It is a single unit of speech, delivered from where you already stand, at the volume you would use to ask about the weather, and it ends with a question that somebody in the circle can answer without standing up.

Everything in this chapter happens between "I am standing next to them" and "she said yes." That whole stretch should take under thirty seconds. Not because speed is impressive — because every second past thirty is a second in which somebody in the circle starts building an opinion about hypnosis, and opinions about hypnosis are always worse than experiences of it.

5.1 The Eight-Second Question

The most common mistake is not being too bold. It is explaining.

I spent one entire summer opening with a two-minute preamble. It was a good preamble. It covered what hypnosis is, what it isn't, that nobody is asleep, that

they stay in control, that it's not a party trick and also that it is a party trick. It was accurate, it was honest, and it killed almost every group I used it on. Here is why: the moment you explain hypnosis, the subject of the conversation is hypnosis. Now there is a topic on the table, and a circle of six people at a festival will do to a topic exactly what circles of six people do — they will have a debate about it. Somebody will say his cousin was hypnotised at a fair. Somebody will say it's all fake. Somebody will say she read that only stupid people can be hypnotised. You will have to answer all three, and you will still not have touched a single hand.

You do not want a topic. You want a hand.

The eight seconds have to carry three pieces of information and nothing else:

1. **What it costs.** A time budget, in numbers, stated before anyone has to decide.

2. **What shape it has.** Where it happens on the body, and what nobody has to do.

3. **A way in that isn't a yes-or-no about hypnosis.**

That is all. Everything else — what trance is, whether they'll remember, whether you can make them bark — gets answered later, if it gets asked at all, and by then you'll be answering from inside the game instead of outside it.

The base form

Say it exactly like this:

"Hey — quick thing. I do a bit of hypnosis. Takes about a minute, it's a hand thing, nobody has to stand up.

(Half a second. Not longer. Look at the group, not at one person.)

Who's the most stubborn one here?"

Twenty-nine words. Eight seconds at conversational speed. Now take it apart, because every piece is load-bearing and swapping any of them costs you something specific.

"Hey — quick thing." An interrupt with a size label attached. You have told them the price before you have shown them the product, which means nobody has to spend attention working out whether they are trapped. Do not open with "Sorry to bother you" — apologising for existing invites them to agree that you are a bother. Do not open with "Can I ask you something?" — that is a yes-or-no question about a question, and you have now burned one of your eight seconds getting permission to spend the other seven.

"I do a bit of hypnosis." Note the size of the claim. *A bit*. You are not announcing an identity. "I'm a hypnotist" is an identity claim, and identity claims get audited: *oh yeah? do me then*. The auditor is now in charge of the frame and you are performing for him. "I do a bit of" is small, unimpressive, and unauditable. It also happens to be true, which matters more than it sounds — the whole craft in this book runs on saying things that are true and letting other people fill in the rest.

"Takes about a minute." The single most valuable clause in the sentence. The silent objection in a stranger's head is almost never *is this real*. It is *how long am I stuck with this guy*. Give the number and the objection dissolves before it's spoken. Use a number that is honest for the routine you actually intend to run. If your opener takes forty seconds, say forty seconds. If you say a minute and you're still going at four, you have taught that circle that your numbers mean nothing, and your numbers are the thing everything else rests on.

"It's a hand thing." Names the body part. This does two jobs at once. It tells them where the event will happen — small, local, visible, nowhere near anything private — and it quietly deletes the picture they are already holding, which is a stage, a spotlight, and a man clucking like a chicken in front of two hundred people. You do not have to argue with that picture. You just have to hand them a smaller one.

"Nobody has to stand up." Removes the physical cost. At half past eleven, in a camping chair, with a blanket over the knees, "you'd have to get up" is a genuine reason to say no. It is also, more usefully, the polite disguise for a different reason: *I don't want to be the one on display*. Both die in the same clause.

"Who's the most stubborn one here?" The ask is not *do you want to be hypnotised*. That question can be answered no by one person on behalf of the whole circle, and often is. This one can't. It is a selection question aimed at the group, it carries a flattering label, and the group answers it faster than any individual would answer anything. Two of them will

point at the same person and laugh. That person is now nominated.

Nomination is not consent. Say it to yourself now, because in the moment it feels like consent and it isn't. The group put a finger on her. She has said nothing. What you do next is turn to her, use her actual name once you have it, and ask her with your own mouth, in a way she can decline without losing face in front of her friends. If she says no, the answer is no, and it stays no even if all five of the others tell her not to be boring. Somebody who only sits down because the circle pushed her is not a volunteer. She is a hostage with good manners, and the routine will feel like one.

The sobriety check, done in four seconds

Before the pre-frame, before anything, you run the gate from Chapter 3. Do it without making a ceremony of it. Ask her something that requires her to hold an answer for two beats:

> *"What's your name — and where are you camped, roughly?"*

You are not interested in the campsite. You are watching whether the second half of your question survived the first half. If she gives you a name and then asks you what you just said, or answers a question you didn't ask, or takes four seconds to find the word for "over there" — she is not a volunteer tonight. Not because of morals. Because she will not remember it tomorrow, she cannot give you a clean yes, and every person watching will read the scene as something other than a game.

The exit for that case is one line and no explanation:

> *"Different plan — I'll come back and get you tomorrow, you'll enjoy it more. Who else is in?"*

(Say it cheerfully and immediately. If you hesitate first, everyone knows why you skipped her, and now she's been publicly graded.)

5.2 The Direct Ask

For circles that are already in a good mood: laughing, loose, three or four people minimum, at least one of them looking at you with open curiosity rather than assessment. If the group is quiet, tired, or mid-argument, this is the wrong tool and the next one is the right one.

ROUTINE 5.2 — The Direct Ask

What it is You walk up, name the thing, name the price, and let the group nominate somebody. She agrees out loud in front of her friends.
How long 25 to 30 seconds, ask to yes
What you need Nothing. Both hands empty and visible.
Prerequisite None — this is the front door. Circle of three or more, audibly in a good mood, nobody obviously impaired.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Hey — quick thing. I do a bit of hypnosis. Takes about a minute, it's a hand thing, nobody has to stand up.*
>
> *(Beat. Look at the group.)*
>
> *Who's the most stubborn one here?*

(Let them point. Let them laugh. Don't move into the circle yet — one step in only after somebody has been named.)

Yeah? What's your name?

(She answers. Use it immediately and then not more than twice more in the next minute. Any more and it sounds like a technique, because it is one.)

Anna. Fine. Two things and then we start: you're not going to be asleep, and if you want to stop, you say stop and we're finished, no explanation, no discussion. Deal?

(Wait for the word. Not a nod. The word.)

Good. Hands out, palms down, like you're holding a tray."

That last line is the hinge. You have stopped asking and started staging, and you did it in the same breath as her yes, so there is no gap for the group to fill with commentary. The instruction is physical, tiny, and impossible to get wrong — which is exactly what the first instruction always has to be.

Two positioning notes, and they are not decoration. Stand at forty-five degrees to her, not in front of her. Face-to-face is an interview or a confrontation; at forty-five degrees you are both looking at the same thing, which is her hands. And keep one arm's length plus twenty centimetres. Close enough to reach a wrist when you announce it, far enough that nobody watching reads the scene as pressure.

If it doesn't come Nobody gets nominated. Three seconds of silence, chairs shift, somebody looks at their phone.

Take it yourself and leave: "Alright, tough crowd. Fair enough." Then, already half turned away: "If you change your mind we're at the blue tarp by the water point."

Do not ask twice. Do not lower the price. Do not say "come on, it only takes a minute" — you already told them it takes a minute, and repeating it tells them you need this more than they do. Groups that said no to a cheerful stranger frequently come and find that stranger later. Groups that said no to somebody who then negotiated never do.

5.3 The Sideways Game

Some circles will lock up at the word. You can see it: somebody's face closes half a centimetre, an arm crosses, the laughter goes one notch politer. There are people for whom "hypnosis" means church, or a bad documentary, or a boyfriend who once did something they didn't like. Arguing with that costs you four minutes and wins you nothing.

So don't use the word. Use a game.

The sideways approach delays the *word*. It never delays the *consent*. That distinction is the whole ethical spine of this routine and I want it flat on the table before the script: what follows is a forty-second imagination game that anyone can stop by dropping their arms, and it goes no further than that on its own.

The moment you want to do anything beyond it — anything at all — you stop, you name what it is, and you ask out loud. No exceptions, no clever bridging, no "well, she's basically already agreed."

ROUTINE 5.3 — The Sideways Game

What it is You offer to show them something odd. It's a suggestibility test in a party costume. If it works, the word "hypnosis" enters the conversation afterwards — from them, usually.
How long 40 seconds. First movement usually inside twenty.
What you need Their hands. Nothing else.
Prerequisite None. Best for circles that would flinch at the word: older, soberer, more religious, or simply more tired than the group two tents over.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Do you want to see something weird? Takes forty seconds and it's got nothing to do with me — it's a thing your own arms do."*
>
> *(Do not wait for a full yes. A shrug is a yes for a forty-second game. Have your own hands already up in the position while you say it — copying you should be the easiest thing in the situation.)*

That sentence is the entire door, and the door is all this card owes you. What comes out of your mouth next is **ROUTINE 6.1 — The Hand Magnet**, from "hold your hands up in front of you" to the end, word for word as it is printed there, pauses and volume drop included. Run it off that page, not off this one. There is one hand magnet in this book and one wording for it; a second version printed here would only give you a second thing to half-remember at midnight.

If the gap has moved at all, you have a response, three people saw it, and you did not have to defend the word once. The naming comes afterwards and it comes gently:

> *"That's it. That's all hypnosis is, by the way — you doing that. I just talked. Want to try one that's a bit bigger?"*

That last question is the real ask, and now it is being asked of somebody who has just watched her own arms do something she didn't order them to do. Chapter 6 has the full catalogue of these tests, calibrated, with the tells to watch for and what each one predicts. What you need here is only the doorway.

One more thing about the sideways approach: it is also the version to use when you are not sure whether the circle contains somebody who will get loud about the whole idea. A game has no doctrine to argue with. Nobody has ever picked a fight about whether hands can feel warm.

If it doesn't come Hands stay exactly where they were. Somebody drops their arms early and grins at their friend.

You take the miss, out loud, before anyone else can name it: "Nothing. You're a slab of granite." Then hand it straight to the next person: "You. Same thing, arms out."

Never say "you're not concentrating" or "you have to actually try". You have just told a stranger she failed at something she didn't sign up for, in front of her friends, and the circle is now closed to you for the rest of the weekend.

5.4 The Invitation

Somebody comes and gets you. A friend told them. "Are you the hypnosis guy? Do me."

This is the hardest of the three and everybody gets it backwards. It feels like the easy one — the asking is done, the consent is enthusiastic, the audience is pre-sold. That is exactly the problem. Whatever they were told about you on the way over here is better than what you can actually do. Somebody has described a thing they half remember, in a tent, at night, with beer, and by the time it reaches the person now standing in front of you it has grown a stage and a swinging watch. *(There is no watch. There never was one that worked. It is a prop for photographs.)*

So the first thing you do with an invitation is spend fifteen seconds making it smaller. Not by being modest — modesty sounds like fishing. By being specific.

ROUTINE 5.4 — The Invitation

What it is Somebody seeks you out with an expectation. Before anything begins you replace the expectation with a smaller, truer one — and you pick who actually goes first.
How long 30 to 40 seconds of talking before you start
What you need Nothing. Enough space that you're not doing this inside a ring of faces.
Prerequisite The person asking is sober enough to hold a two-part question. Applies hardest here: excitement looks a lot like impairment at midnight, and it isn't the same thing. Check.

Say it exactly like this:

"Depends what they told you. Here's the actual version.

It's not sleep, it's not a coma, and I can't make anybody do anything they wouldn't do on a normal Tuesday. What it is, is a set of small games where your body does something before you've decided to do it. Some people get a lot out of them. Some people get a little. Both are normal and I can't tell which you are by looking at you.

(Now the pivot — and you deliver it while already looking past him at the group he came from.)

We'll do a short one first and see what happens. If it goes somewhere, we keep going. If it doesn't, we've lost a minute and you've got a story about the guy who couldn't hypnotise you.

(Beat.)

Who did you come over here with?"

That last question is doing more work than it looks. The person who came and got you is usually the wrong first subject. He is excited, he is watching himself do it, and he wants to report back — which means part of his attention is standing outside the whole thing taking notes. That part is the one you cannot work with. The quiet one he brought with him, the one who is here because her friend dragged her, is very often the one whose hands move first.

You do not have to say any of that out loud. You just have to ask who he came with, take three of them, and run the forty-second test from 5.3 on all three at once. Then you use whoever responded. The requester gets

to be there, which is what he actually wanted, and you have quietly converted an audition into a selection.

If he insists — and about a third of them do — take him. Just take him second, after somebody else has already produced a visible response. Standing next to somebody whose arm just did something odd is worth more than any amount of talking you could have done to him.

If it doesn't come He insisted on going first, you ran the opener, and nothing moved. Now four people are watching the guy who asked for it get nothing.

Take the miss onto yourself and reroute in one breath: "Right — you're a slow burner, that's a real category, it just needs longer than I've got standing up. Give me your friend for forty seconds and then I'll come back to you."

Then actually come back to him. Ten minutes later, after somebody else has responded, in a quieter spot, with a different opener. The second attempt on the same person lands more often than the first — not because of anything mystical, but because he has now watched it happen to somebody standing eighty centimetres away from him and the question in his head has changed from "is this real" to "why not me".

5.5 The Pre-Frame in Thirty Seconds

Whatever the approach was, everything from here converges on the same thirty seconds. This is the piece of speech that makes every routine in the rest of this book easier, and it is the piece most people skip because it doesn't feel like doing anything.

It is doing something very specific. People resist for three reasons and only three. Name each one before she has to raise it, and there is nothing left to push against.

Reason one: she thinks she'll go somewhere and not come back. The picture in her head is unconsciousness — a gap, a blackout, waking up not knowing. So you tell her it isn't sleep, and you tell her what she will actually be doing, which is hearing everything, including the band two fields over and somebody's tent zip.

Reason two: she thinks she can't get out. The fear isn't of the trance, it's of the social trap — of being the girl who has to sit there while the guy finishes his thing. So you hand her an exit that costs nothing to use. Not a theoretical exit. A word, plus a promise that using it requires no reason.

Reason three: she thinks it's a test of her. This is the big one and almost nobody names it. Half the population believes that being hypnotisable means being weak-minded, and the other half believes it means being imaginative, and either way she thinks the next sixty seconds will produce a verdict about her character in front of her friends. Take the verdict off the table and the performance pressure goes with it.

Nothing kills a response faster than somebody trying to have one.

ROUTINE 5.5 — The Thirty-Second Pre-Frame

What it is The four sentences you say before anything starts, that remove the three reasons people brace.
How long 30 seconds. Roughly 90 words at a slow pace.
What you need Her attention and no interruptions. If somebody in
the circle is talking, wait them out. Don't compete.
Prerequisite Her audible yes from 5.2, 5.3, or 5.4.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Before we start — three things, thirty seconds.*
>
> *This isn't sleep. You'll hear me the whole time, you'll hear the music, you'll hear whatever your friends say about you, and you'll remember it in the morning. (No, she will not be asleep. Nobody has ever been asleep.)*
>
> *Second: if you want to stop, say stop. Not 'I'd rather not' — just stop. Then we're done, straight away, and you don't owe me a reason.*
>
> *Third, and this is the one people get wrong: if nothing happens, that says nothing about you. It's not about being weak or clever or gullible. It's a bit like whether you cry at films. Some people do, some don't, neither of them is the better person.*
>
> *So there's nothing for you to make happen here. You can just stand there and notice what your hands do."*

Now look at what that block is actually built out of, because the same skeleton carries every script in the

rest of this book.

It opens on things she can verify while you're saying them — *you'll hear the music* — which is a truth her ears confirm in real time. Confirmed truths lower the rate at which the next sentence gets checked. It hands her control rather than requesting it: *say stop* is an instruction that increases her power, and instructions that increase somebody's power are the only ones strangers follow instantly. It removes the scoreboard, which removes the effort, which removes the single biggest cause of nothing happening. And it ends on a delegation — *what your hands do* — so that the thing being asked for is not being asked of her at all. She is now an observer of her own hands, which is a much easier job than being a subject.

One thing the pre-frame never contains: a prediction. Not "you're going to feel your arm get heavy", not "in a moment you'll notice you can't open your eyes." Every prediction hands her a task, and the task is to check whether you were right. Checking is the exact opposite of what has to happen next. Predictions are also how you build a reputation you have to defend, and this book has no interest in defending anything.

If it doesn't come The pre-frame lands and she gets more nervous instead of less: shoulders up, arms crossed, "yeah, but what if I can't get out of it."

You have hit somebody with a specific worry, not a general one. Don't reassure harder — reassurance is fuel. Shrink the offer instead: "Then let's not do that one. Do this instead — eyes open, hands out, nothing else. Twenty seconds. If it's boring we

stop." An eyes-open game with a stated twenty-second lid is a different object in her head than the thing she was afraid of. If she's still braced after that, she has answered you. Move on and stay friendly.

5.6 The Two Questions That Always Come

Two of them, and they arrive in almost every circle. Both have exactly one good answer and dozens of bad ones. The bad ones all share a feature: they argue.

"Does it work on me?"

The bad answer is "yes, definitely." You have now made a testable claim about a stranger's nervous system, in public, thirty seconds before it gets tested. The whole architecture of this craft runs on not doing that.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"I don't know. Nobody does before we look — not me, and not you.*
>
> *What I can tell you is that it's got nothing to do with being smart or being easily fooled. It's closer to how easily you get pulled into a film. Some people are in the film by minute two, some people are still noticing the boom mic. Both of those people exist and one isn't better.*
>
> *We'll do a small one first. Forty seconds. Then you'll know more about it than I do."*

Three things are happening there. You refused the promise, which means there is nothing for reality to contradict. You moved the whole question onto an ordinary, non-shameful skill — getting absorbed in a story — which is a thing everyone privately believes they are at least average at. And you finished by handing her the authority: *you'll know more than I do*. She is now the one running the experiment, and people do not resist their own experiments.

"I've got too strong a will."

This is the important one. It arrives in every second circle, usually from a man, usually with his arms folded, usually in a tone that is half joke and half warning. It is also the single most useful sentence anybody at a campsite will ever hand you, because it is not actually a refusal. It is a request to be taken seriously.

Do not contradict it. Do not smile and say "we'll see about that." That converts the next sixty seconds into a contest with exactly one way for him to win — by nothing happening — and he will win it. Never build a situation where the other person's victory condition is your failure.

You don't argue with the claim. You accept it completely and then turn it around, because the claim happens to be a description of something genuinely useful.

ROUTINE 5.6 — The Strong Will Turn

What it is The answer to "I've got too strong a will." You agree with him and hand the same trait back to him as the raw material for the thing he just said

he can't do.
How long 20 seconds
What you need Nothing. Do not touch him during this. Hands still.
Prerequisite None. Learn this one by heart before you learn any induction.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good. That's the useful kind.*
>
> *Everybody who says that has the same thing in common — they can hold one thought and not let it slide off. That's not a wall against this. That's the material it's made of.*
>
> *And the more you keep your attention on one small thing — this hand, say — the more there is for you to notice happening in it.*
>
> *There's nothing to force. You couldn't force it anyway, and you don't have to try, which is convenient because trying is the one thing that gets in the way.*
>
> *Some part of you already knows how to lock onto one thing until everything else goes quiet. You do it every time you drive somewhere and arrive without remembering the last three junctions.*
>
> *So whether that hand does something strange in a minute or just gets warm and heavy — either way, you'll be the one who notices which."*

Take it apart layer by layer, because this is the cleanest example in the book of the architecture that everything else is built on.

"Good. That's the useful kind." — Agreement, instantly. He came with a shield and you have declined to attack it. There is nothing to defend.

"Everybody who says that has the same thing in common..." — A statement about a category, not about him. Categories cannot be checked. He can't disprove it and he doesn't want to, because it flatters him.

"That's the material it's made of." — The reframe. The trait is unchanged; only its function has moved. He does not have to give anything up, which is why this doesn't feel like losing.

"And the more you keep your attention on one small thing... the more there is for you to notice." — The bridge. The first half is true and under his control. The second half rides across on the conjunction. Note what is *not* claimed: not that something will happen, only that there will be more to notice. Notice also where the suggestion is aimed — at the hand, not at him. He can keep his strong will entirely intact while his hand does something else. That is not a trick of wording, it's the actual mechanism: you cannot simultaneously let go and steer, so you give the letting-go to a body part and let the steering keep its job.

"There's nothing to force... trying is the one thing that gets in the way." — Permission plus a quiet double bind. If he tries hard, he was warned. If he doesn't try, he has done what was asked. There is no version of the next minute where he has done it wrong.

"Some part of you already knows..." — A blank with no actor and no measure in it. He fills it himself, from his own life, with the driving example as a starting point. Whatever he fills it with will be more persuasive than anything I could have supplied, because he wrote it.

"Whether it does something strange or just gets warm and heavy — either way, you'll be the one who notices which." — The seal. Two outcomes offered, both of them wins, and the leftover doubt has been parked on the *noticing* rather than on the event. Nothing that happens in the next minute can be filed as a failure.

Twenty seconds, no promise made, no claim he can catch you on, and the folded arms come apart roughly two times in three. *(Not always. Some people mean it, and those people are entitled to mean it.)*

If it doesn't come He keeps arguing. Second objection, then a third. He is enjoying this more than he would enjoy the routine.

Concede fully and leave the door open in the same breath: "Might be right. Some people take a lot longer than one minute standing up at a festival, and that's a fair thing to be." Then, to the group, not to him: "Who's next?"

Do not use his objection as material later. Do not come back to him with "so, changed your mind?" If he wants in after somebody else has responded, he will move closer without saying anything. That is the signal. Wait for it.

5.7 When a Crowd Forms

It happens the second something visible occurs. One arm goes stiff, one pair of hands drifts apart, and within twenty seconds you have gone from six people to fourteen. Somebody two tents over saw it, somebody's friend was walking past with a crate of beer and stopped. A crowd at a festival assembles faster than anywhere else on earth because everyone there is specifically looking for something to happen.

The crowd is the best thing that can happen to you and the fastest way to lose the volunteer. Which of those it turns out to be is decided in about ten seconds by three things: where you stand, where their eyes go, and whether you give them a job.

ROUTINE 5.7 — Turning the Ring

What it is The ten seconds of staging and one line of speech that convert a gathering crowd into an audience instead of an interruption.
How long 10 seconds
What you need Two metres of ground and the ability to change your own volume by half.
Prerequisite A visible response has already happened. Before that, there is no crowd.

Where you stand. Move so that you are between the volunteer and the newest arrivals. Not to block them — to be the thing they arrive at. New people entering a scene look for whoever is talking; if you are on that side, their attention lands on you and not on her face. And never let anybody stand behind her. If somebody does, move her, not them: half a step, one hand indicating the direction, and say why out loud — "step

round here, the ground's flatter." A reason nobody can object to is better than an instruction they have to obey.

Where the eyes go. Her eyes need exactly one thing in their cone: her own hands, or the fire, or your hand. No new faces in that direction. If the crowd is closing into a ring — and rings close fast around a fire — break it by stepping into the gap and turning her ninety degrees so she is facing outward at nothing. A person surrounded on all sides is a person doing crowd management with the back of her head, and there is no attention left over for anything else.

The job. Say this once, at normal speaking volume, to the whole crowd, and then never address them again until the routine is finished.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Everyone — two things. Stay where you are, and stay quiet until I say her name out loud. And nobody touches her, not even as a joke.*
>
> *(Then, immediately, to her, in a completely different voice — quieter, slower, half the volume:)*
>
> *They're behind me, not behind you. Keep looking at your hands."*

The gear change between those two sentences is the technique. The crowd hears the difference and understands, without being told, that there are now two conversations and they are only in one of them. That is what makes them an audience rather than fourteen participants.

Phones come up within about fifteen seconds. Deal with it fast, and deal with it by asking her, not them:

"Anna — phones or no phones? Out loud."

(Whatever she says, you say to the crowd:)

"You heard her."

Never let the crowd decide that question. Never decide it yourself. She is the one who will be looking at the footage on Monday.

Recruiting from the ring. When the routine ends and the noise comes, you have a window of about eight seconds in which every person watching has just moved from *is this real* to *what would that feel like*. Spend it:

"Right — who wants the next one? Not all at once. You three, stay exactly where you are, everyone else give us a step back."

Naming a specific number and pointing at specific people converts an amorphous crowd into a queue with almost no friction. If you ask for volunteers in general, you get a wall of noise and nobody moves. If you pick three, all three come.

The numbers. Up to about six people, it is still a circle and you can run everything in this book conversationally. Between seven and twelve you are running a small circle and you should be looking at Chapter 11. Past about fifteen, one of two things has to happen: either you finish what you are doing inside ninety seconds and get out, or you restructure the whole thing into a set — seating, sightlines, a proper

selection round — which is Chapter 12 and takes longer to set up than most people expect. What does not work is trying to run an intimate one-on-one routine while twenty people who missed the first half ask each other what's going on.

If it doesn't come They don't settle. Somebody at the back keeps talking, or one loud man starts narrating.

Do not shush him and do not engage. Both hand him the floor. Instead, drop your own volume by half again and speak only to her. Crowds regulate their own volume against the loudest speaker; when the loudest speaker goes quiet, the front row shushes the back row for you, and they do it harder than you ever could.

If it still doesn't settle after fifteen seconds, end cleanly rather than fighting for it: finish the routine you're in, wake her properly — every time, no exceptions — and move the whole thing forty metres away with three people. A ruined scene costs you one routine. A volunteer left half-finished in a shouting match costs you the rest of the night.

5.8 What You Never Say

Short list. Every entry has cost me something.

"You're going to feel your arm get heavy." A prediction is a test you have set yourself and handed to somebody else to mark. Replace with awareness: *you'll notice what your arm does.*

"I'm going to make you..." Claims control, invites the exact resistance it describes, and is not true. *(Nobody is controlling anybody here. That was never on offer, and if it were, this book would be a different and much worse book.)*

"In a moment you won't be able to open your eyes." Same fault as the prediction, with an added feature: you have named the one action she can take to prove you wrong, and now it is the only thing in her head.

"Don't be nervous." Installs the thing it denies. Anything shaped like *don't think about X* is a delivery system for X.

"Just relax." An order to perform a state that cannot be produced on command. It also implies she is currently doing it wrong. Give a physical instruction instead — hands out, feet apart, look at that — and let the rest follow.

"Trust me." Asks for the thing you are supposed to be earning. Nobody has ever said it and been trusted more afterwards.

"You're a really good subject." Grading. The instant she is being graded, she starts performing for the grade, and performance and response are mutually exclusive. Also, the compliment implies the existence of a bad subject, which is the belief you spent the pre-frame dismantling.

"This always works." Overclaim, and one that expires the first time it doesn't. Your credibility at a campsite is built almost entirely on the accuracy of the small numbers you give — the minute, the forty

seconds, the twenty. Protect them by never making a big claim you can't hit.

"Look into my eyes." Theatre from a film, plus a staring contest that you will lose because she will blink, laugh, and break the frame. Her eyes have somewhere better to be: her own hands.

"Sleep." There is a place for a single hard word delivered flat, and it is a show with twelve people in front of you who all know they're at a show. It is not a first conversation with a stranger holding a beer. Chapter 12 covers the register that word belongs to. Using it here reads as somebody doing an impression of a hypnotist.

Any joke at her expense, before or during. The friends may joke. You may not. You are the only person in the circle who has to be unambiguously on her side, and the moment that is in doubt, the response stops.

The common thread: every one of those lines either claims a power you don't have, or hands her a job she can fail at. Everything worth saying does neither.

When It Goes Wrong

The refusal. It is the most common outcome by a distance and it deserves more craft than the yes does.

My own tally from one four-day festival, cold approaches only — circles that had not seen me do anything, walked up to from standing, not counting anybody who came and found me: forty-one circles, seventeen yeses on the spot, sixteen straight nos, eight of the vague kind that mean no with better manners.

That is a hit rate of about four in ten, from somebody who has been doing this for years, at the friendliest kind of venue there is. Cold is the low end, and the low end is the number you plan a night around: once a circle has already watched somebody's hands do something they didn't order, the same ask lands at seven or eight in ten. Same words, same man saying them, different half of the evening — and that is one tally split by whether they had seen anything yet, not two tallies.

These forty-one circles are also where the arithmetic in Chapter 1 comes from — one count, not a second one, and every rate quoted anywhere in this book is cut from it. If you go out tonight expecting eight out of ten from the first circle you walk up to, you will be badly rattled by nine o'clock. Most people will say no. That is not a failure, that is the arithmetic, and once you have properly accepted the arithmetic the nos stop landing on you personally.

There are three kinds and they are not handled the same way.

The flat no. One person, usually the one you spoke to, says "no thanks" with a closed face. Nothing to salvage, and nothing to be sad about. Leave in under four seconds.

The group no. One sceptic answers on behalf of five people, three of whom were interested. Tempting to work around him. Don't — not now. He is defending the circle and you would be asking four people to publicly overrule their friend at midnight. What you do instead is leave a location, because two of those four will come and find you separately later, without him,

and those are frequently the best subjects of the night.

The deferral. "Maybe later." About one in three of these are real. You cannot tell which, and it doesn't matter, because the correct response is identical for both.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"No problem at all.*
>
> *(Start turning your body away on 'problem'. Not stepping away — turning. Your voice should be the last thing that leaves.)*
>
> *We're around all weekend. Blue tarp, by the water point on the east side. If you get curious, come and grab me — I'd rather do it for people who want it."*

Then go. Do not add a sentence. Do not look back for a reaction. Do not do the thing where you leave slowly in case somebody changes their mind, because everyone can see you doing it.

Four things kill the callback, and I have done all four:

Asking twice. The second ask converts you from a person offering something into a person who needs something.

Asking why. "Ah, why not?" demands that she construct a justification, and once she has said it out loud, she has to defend it for the rest of the weekend.

The challenge. "Scared?" — the worst sentence in this entire book. It is contempt with a question mark on it, it works on nobody over nineteen, and it guarantees you will not be asked back by anyone in earshot.

Discounting. "It only takes thirty seconds, honestly, it's really quick." You already gave a number. Repeating it smaller tells the circle the number was never real.

The reason the graceful exit is worth learning properly has nothing to do with being a nice person, although that is a good enough reason on its own. It is that a festival is a village of maybe four thousand people who will all still be there tomorrow. The circle that said no at half eleven walks past your tent at two, sees five people laughing around a fire with somebody's arm stuck to their forehead, and remembers that the guy who asked them earlier took the no without making it weird. Of my sixteen flat nos that weekend, four came and found me later. All four had watched something happen to somebody else in between.

The one that stings is different, and you should know about it before it happens to you. Occasionally you will get the *cold* no — the one where somebody visibly recoils, the circle goes silent, and you realise you have walked into something. Somebody's ex is a hypnotherapist. Somebody's evening has already gone badly. You have no idea what you have hit and you are not going to find out. One sentence, no charm, no joke, and move:

"Understood. Sorry to interrupt."

Say it flat. Do not smile — a smile in that moment reads as not taking her seriously. Then leave properly, forty metres minimum, and do not work the next circle within sight of that one. You are not owed an explanation and asking for one is how a bad ten seconds becomes a bad hour.

Chapter 6 — The Openers: Suggestibility Tests

She said yes eleven seconds ago and now she is standing there with her arms slightly away from her body, waiting for you to do something impressive. There is no chair. There is a beer bench with three people sitting on it, a fire four metres to your left, and a bass line coming over the hedge that you cannot turn down. You have about twenty seconds before her friend says something funny and the moment is gone.

So you do not induce anything. You hold your own hands up in front of your chest and say: *hold them like this.*

That is the whole opening. Every card below is a version of it.

A suggestibility test is two jobs wearing one coat. It is a measurement — you find out how this person, tonight, on this field, responds to a sentence. And it is already the work. Every second she spends with her attention on her own hands is a second she is not spending on the noise, on her friends, on the question of whether she looks stupid. By the time a good test is over, she is closer than she was when it started, and you did not have to call it anything. *(No, you are not finding out whether she "can be hypnotized". There is no switch to find and nothing to test for. You are finding out how long her lag is tonight.)*

Read the result in three bands, and read it off her face, not her hands.

Full. The movement happens, roughly on time, and it does a bit more than you asked for. She reacts to it — a laugh a half-second late, a small intake of breath, a look at her own hands as if they had been swapped. The face is the tell. Hands can be faked in both directions; surprise cannot, not by amateurs, and everyone on a campsite is an amateur.

Partial. Something moves. Two centimetres, ten seconds late, and she had to help it along. This is not a failure. This is the most common result you will ever get and most of your evening will be built on it.

Nothing. Her hands stay exactly where she put them and she looks at you, pleasantly, waiting for the next part. Note it, drop it, move on within four seconds. The gap after a dead test is what kills the group, not the dead test.

My own tally, across two summers and something like four hundred openers: out of ten people who have said yes and got past the gate, one gives me everything at once, three give me a full result the person next to her can see, four give me a partial that nobody but she notices, and two give me nothing at all tonight. That is not a study and I am not pretending it is one. It is the arithmetic I plan my evening around, and since only the first four of those ten are worth building on, it means five or six tests on a good night to find the two people I want.

Which is the answer to the obvious question — why test at all, why not go straight into an induction and save the time.

Because a test costs thirty seconds and nobody's dignity. A failed induction costs the group. If you walk someone through ninety seconds of eye-closing and counting in front of her four friends and nothing happens, you do not get a second attempt with those four friends. The circle has now watched you try and miss, and circles remember the miss much better than they remember the hit. A test that dies is invisible. Somebody held her hands up, nothing happened, someone made a joke, life continued. You can lose eight of those in a row and still be the person who is fun to stand next to.

And a test gives you information you cannot get any other way: how long she waits before she responds, whether she takes instructions literally or interprets them, whether she needs to be touched to believe something, whether she checks with you before every move. That last one matters more than the result. The people who glance at you for permission are the people who will follow an induction.

One thing carries over from Chapter 5 and it carries over into every card below. Before the first test, she has heard two sentences from you: that she can stop it at any point by saying stop, and that she does not owe you a reason. Say it once, plainly, at a normal volume, where her friends can hear it. And before any of this: if she cannot ask you a clear question and still have the answer thirty seconds later, she is not a volunteer tonight. Not a judgement. A working condition, like flat ground.

6.1 The Hand Magnet

ROUTINE 6.1 — The Hand Magnet

What it is She holds her hands apart in front of her and the gap closes without her deciding to close it.
How long 40 seconds
What you need Nothing. Her two hands and enough room that she isn't
elbowing anyone.
Prerequisite None. This is the first thing you do, every time.

This one runs on drift: hundreds of tiny muscle corrections she cannot feel one at a time, all pointing very slightly inward because that is where her attention is, added up over half a minute and read by her as a pull. *(Nothing is pulling her hands. Her own forearms are, and that is the entire trick, and it is not a cheat — self-generated movement is exactly what you are shopping for.)*

Set it up standing, facing her at about forty-five degrees, not square on. Square on reads as a challenge. Show the position on your own hands first and never adjust hers with your fingers.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Hold your hands up in front of you. Palms facing each other, about this far apart. (Show her on your own hands. Twenty centimetres, no wider. Don't touch hers.) Good — a bit higher, chest height. Now look at the gap between them. Not at me. At the gap.*
>
> *Your arms are holding themselves up right now and you're not thinking about how. They just do that. (Pause. Two seconds.)*

And as you keep looking at that space, you don't have to move anything. Nothing to push. Nothing to force. You can just let your hands carry on doing whatever they're already doing.

Some part of you has done this before — a doorway, a fridge magnet, one of those toys when you were seven. (Drop your volume here. Slower, not louder. If it's loud, get closer; never shout a suggestion.)

And the longer you watch that gap, the more you'll notice what the gap is doing. Whether it closes all the way, or gets narrower, or just gets warmer in the middle — either way, you'll feel it before you see it.

Closer. (Say it on her out-breath.) And closer. Letting them.

When the hands touch, do not celebrate. Do not clap, do not say *see?* Nod once, take half a step back, and say: **"That's yours. I didn't do any of that."**

If they close halfway and stop, take the halfway. Say the same line. Halfway is a pass.

If it doesn't come After forty seconds, stop. Don't say "again", don't say "concentrate". Take a step back and hand her a role: "Fine — you're a watcher, not a mover. Watchers are more use to me anyway. Stand here and tell me when his hands touch." Then run 6.1 on somebody else with her as the official observer. She has now had a good thirty seconds and lost nothing.

6.2 The Finger Vise

ROUTINE 6.2 — The Finger Vise

What it is She laces her fingers together and cannot take them apart until you say so.
How long 50 seconds
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite None, but it lands twice as hard after a pass on 6.1.

Where 6.1 asked for a movement, this one asks for a movement that cannot easily succeed: pulling laced fingers apart uses a lot of the same machinery that holds them together, so the harder she pulls the more locked it feels. The suggestion is not carrying the whole weight here. It is riding on something that was already true, which is why this one works on people who gave you nothing on the magnet.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Lace your fingers together. All the way down — knuckles interlocked, not just fingertips. (Show her on your own hands. Check hers with your eyes. Don't reach over and fix them.)*
>
> *Now squeeze. Harder than that. And straighten your arms out in front of you, and turn the palms away from you.*
>
> *Good. Feel how much of your own strength is in there right now. That's all yours; I haven't done anything.*
>
> *And the more you squeeze, the tighter it gets — and the tighter it gets, the more it stops being two hands and starts being one.*

In a moment I'm going to ask you to try. Not to succeed. To try. And you may find that trying is the thing that makes it tighter. Some part of you has already picked which way this goes.

Try to pull them apart. Try. (Two seconds. Not one. Let it get slightly uncomfortable — that's where the convincing lives.)

Harder. And notice how the harder you pull, the more it holds.

(Three seconds. Then, in a completely ordinary voice:) Stop. Relax your hands. They come apart now.

Always release it out loud. Never leave a lock in place because the circle is laughing. A person whose hands come apart when you say so has just had a very good experience; a person whose hands come apart while you are turned away chatting has had a slightly humiliating one, and you will not get her back.

If it doesn't come Her hands separate immediately. Say nothing about it. "Good — fast hands. Fast hands are what I want for this next one," and go straight to 6.4, which asks for the opposite of speed. Never re-run the vise on the same person the same evening. The second attempt tells the whole circle the first one mattered.

6.3 The Heavy Arm

ROUTINE 6.3 — The Heavy Arm

What it is She holds one arm straight out and it gets heavy and sinks.
How long 60 seconds
What you need Nothing. A metre of clear space beside her.
Prerequisite None. This is your test for people who won't lace their fingers, and for people whose hands are full.

This one does not ask for a new sensation. It turns up one that is arriving anyway: an outstretched arm gets heavy on its own after thirty seconds, and your entire job is to name the weight before she does, so that when it arrives it arrives with your voice on it. Different family from the two above, and much harder to fake in the other direction — she cannot pretend the weight is absent for very long.

Do not run this on anyone who has just told you their shoulder hurts, and do not let it run past ninety seconds. There is no version of this that improves at minute two.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Right arm straight out to the side. Shoulder height. Palm down. (Stand at forty-five degrees to her. Not in front. In front, she reads it as a test she can fail.)*
>
> *Hold it there. Look along it, at your own hand.*
>
> *Right now that arm weighs what it always weighs — about four kilos — and your shoulder is carrying it the way it's carried it your whole life. That's the true part.*

And as you keep it up there, you might start to notice the weight arriving. Not all at once. In the elbow first, usually. Sometimes in the back of the wrist.

You don't have to lower it. Nothing to force. Your arm can decide.

And the more it decides, the heavier it gets. And the heavier it gets, the less it feels like yours. (Never say "down". Say "heavy". The going down looks after itself, and if you say "down" she will lower it on purpose and you will have learned nothing.)

Heavy. Warm and heavy. Like somebody hung a wet coat on your wrist.

And whether it goes all the way to your leg or comes down a hand's width and stops — either way, you'll feel the difference between the arm you put up and the arm that's up now.

When it lands, catch it with a sentence, not with your hand: **"There. Shake it out."**

If it doesn't come Sixty seconds, arm level, rock steady. End it yourself before her shoulder does: "Take it down — you've got a shoulder like a scaffolder." Do not comment further, do not explain what was supposed to happen. Nobody in the circle knows what was supposed to happen unless you tell them.

6.4 The Balloon and the Bucket

ROUTINE 6.4 — The Balloon and the Bucket

What it is One of her arms rises and the other sinks, and when she opens her eyes she can see the gap.
How long 70 seconds
What you need Nothing. Optional: an actual bucket or a full crate on the ground beside her, for the low hand to aim at.
Prerequisite None. This is your default in a loud place.

Two opposite suggestions run side by side here, one per arm, and the contrast does the convincing — she does not have to believe her arms moved, she opens her eyes and measures the gap herself. It is also the only opener here that survives real noise, because the payoff is visual: the ten people standing around can see a forty-centimetre gap between two hands from six metres away, in the dark, with a bass line running. Nobody needs to hear a word you said.

Position her so your voice comes from the quiet side. If the speakers are behind you, move.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Both arms out in front of you, level with each other, palms up. Look at your hands.*
>
> *Left hand: I'm putting a bucket in it. An old metal one, half full of water, and the handle is lying across your palm. Feel where the handle sits.*
>
> *Right hand: there's a string tied round your wrist, and on the end of the string is one of those helium balloons from the gate.*
>
> *Now let your eyes close. (Not "close your eyes." Let. It costs nothing and it does something.)*

You don't have to do anything with either one. Nothing to lift, nothing to lower.

And the more the water in that bucket settles, the more your left hand knows which way is down. And the more the balloon pulls, the less string there is on the right.

Heavy on the left. Light on the right. Neither one is your job.

Some part of you is already keeping score. (Pause. Five seconds. Watch the gap, not her face — the face comes later.)

Without moving them — which hand is higher? (She answers. Whatever she says, take it.)

Open your eyes and have a look.

The pause before "open your eyes" is the whole routine. Give it a full three seconds. Two feels like a magic trick; three feels like something she did.

If it doesn't come Hands dead level. Say "open your eyes" in the same tone you'd have used if it worked, then: "Spirit level. Both of them." And then hand her the job: "Stand here — you're the judge for the next one. Tell us honestly which hand is higher." A person who has just been made the referee is not a person who failed.

6.5 The Sway

ROUTINE 6.5 — The Sway

What it is She stands with her eyes closed and her weight goes backward until somebody catches her.
How long 90 seconds, of which thirty are housekeeping you do not skip.
What you need Two square metres of flat ground, one sober catcher,
and both of her hands empty.
Prerequisite At least one clear pass on 6.1–6.4. This is never somebody's first test.

Balance is the machinery here, and it is not a figure of speech. Her ankles have been making a hundred small corrections a minute since she was two years old without ever asking her permission, and they lose one of their inputs the moment the eyes shut. You are not making her fall. You are removing a reference and then naming the direction she drifts.

Before you say a single word of the routine, do the housekeeping. This is the one card in the chapter where skipping the setup is how somebody gets hurt.

Ground. Walk the two metres behind her yourself and look down. Tent pegs, guy ropes, a bottle on its side, a sleeping dog, the edge of a ground sheet, a slope. A campsite at night is a floor made of trip hazards and you cannot see any of them from where she is standing.

Fire. Four metres minimum, and never with the fire behind her. Never. If the only flat ground is next to the fire, do a different test.

Hands. Both empty. She puts the cup on the bench, not in her friend's hand — in her friend's hand means

her friend is now looking at the cup instead of at her.

The catcher. One person. Sober, and you check that the same way you checked her. He stands directly behind her at half an arm's length — close, not two metres back with a run-up. Feet staggered, one forward one back, so he can take her weight without stepping. Hands down at his sides but ready at her shoulder height.

Where he catches. Both hands, flat, on her shoulders. Not her back, not her waist, not under her arms. Say it to him out loud so she hears it.

The group. Say this before anything else, at full ordinary volume:

> *"Everyone stand still where you are. Marek is the only one who catches her. If two of you grab her, you'll pull her in two directions at once, and that is genuinely how people go over."*

The permission. Then, to her, in the same plain voice:

> *"You'll stand still with your eyes closed. Marek's behind you. When you lean back he'll put his hands on your shoulders — on your shoulders, nowhere else. Is that alright?"*

Wait for a word. A nod is not a word. If she looks at Marek and hesitates, swap Marek. There is always somebody in the circle she would rather have behind her, and she will not say so unless you make it easy.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Feet together. Arms at your sides. Eyes closed.*

Now just stand still. (Give her ten full seconds of nothing. Count them. This is the hardest silence in the chapter and it is not optional.)

Standing still is more work than it looks. Your ankles are making small corrections right now — dozens a minute — and they've been doing it since before you can remember, without checking with you.

And with your eyes closed, they've lost one of the things they were using. So they guess. And as they guess, you might notice the guessing. A little forward. A little back. Nothing to correct.

You're safe. Somebody's behind you. That part's handled. (Say this once. Do not keep reassuring — repeated reassurance is how you tell somebody there's a problem.)

I'm going to hold my hand behind your shoulder now. I won't touch you. (Palm open, a hand's width behind her shoulder — the shoulder, not the spine. Some people feel the warmth. Some don't. It costs you nothing either way.)

And the more you let the guessing happen, the more one direction starts to win.

Back. Toward my hand.

And back. Whether you go a whole hand's width or only far enough that you feel it in your toes — your ankles will tell you before you decide anything.

When she goes, the catcher's hands land on her shoulders and hold. Do not let her hang there for the crowd. Two seconds, then:

"Feet under you. Eyes open. Good — look at me."

Ending on an instruction, not a question. She stands, she blinks, she laughs. Now she is a person who has done something rather than a person something was done to, and that distinction is the reason this test converts so many people into volunteers for Chapter 7.

If it doesn't come She stands like a fence post for ninety seconds. "Open your eyes. Good ankles — some people just have them, it's a real thing." Then give her the best consolation prize in the whole set: make her the catcher for the next person. It's a job with status, it's in front of everyone, and it requires nothing from her nervous system except paying attention.

6.6 Eyes Glued Shut

ROUTINE 6.6 — Eyes Glued Shut

What it is Her eyelids stay shut while she tries to open them.
How long 60 seconds
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite One clear pass on anything above. This is the first test where a miss is visible to her, so bank something first.

This one uses a piece of anatomy as its floor. The ring of muscle that closes the eye is stronger than the small one that lifts the lid, so a genuinely screwed-shut eye is difficult to open by trying, and the suggestion gets to

ride on top of something true instead of carrying the load alone. Different family again: 6.2 locked two body parts against each other, this locks one against itself, and it is the first card that asks her to fail at something on purpose.

(This is not a contest of wills. You never want to win one of those — a volunteer who loses in front of her friends stops being a volunteer.)

Say it exactly like this:

Close your eyes. Now screw them shut — properly tight, like you've got shampoo in them. Tighter than that. (Watch the outer corners. No creases, no lock. Say "tighter" until you see the creases.)

Good. Hold that.

The muscle that closes your eyes is a ring, and it's a lot stronger than the little one that lifts the lid. That's just how the face is put together. Nobody consulted you about it.

And while they're shut that tight, they're doing exactly one job, and they're extremely good at it.

Now roll your eyes up behind the lids. As if you were trying to look at the top of your own forehead. Keep them up there.

And while your eyes are looking up, the lids can stay down. All by themselves. Nothing for you to hold.

In a moment I'll ask you to try to open them. Try — not manage. And you may find the trying is what seals them. Some part of you already knows

they're not opening yet.

Try. (Two seconds. Watch the eyebrows: if the brows climb and the lids stay down, you have it — that's the tell, not the stillness.)

Try harder. And the harder you try, the tighter they lock.

(Two more seconds. Then drop into an ordinary conversational voice — this is the switch that matters:) Stop trying. Let go of your eyes. Let them rest. And when you're ready, they open easily.

Never leave the eyes shut while you turn to talk to the group. Ninety per cent of the bad feeling this test can produce comes from that one lapse.

If it doesn't come Her eyes open on the first try. Do not say "you weren't really trying" — that is you blaming a volunteer for your own timing, in public. Say: "There you are. Some people's lids just won't play. Mine don't either." Then go to 6.7, which uses a surface instead of her own face, and which frequently lands on exactly this person.

6.7 The Stuck Hand

ROUTINE 6.7 — The Stuck Hand

What it is Her hand stays flat on the bench and won't lift.
How long 50 seconds
What you need A flat surface — a beer bench, a cool box, a crate lid, a car bonnet — and announced permission to press the back of her hand for three seconds.
Prerequisite At least one prior pass. This test borrows its credibility from the ones before it.

The bench does half the work on this one. A real cold surface under her palm gives the suggestion something physical to attach to — she is not asked to imagine anything, only to notice what is already pressing on her skin. It is also the most useful card on this list for a seated group, since nobody has to stand up, nobody has to be caught, and it works with a full table in front of her.

The touch here is announced and it is three seconds of flat pressure on the back of the hand. Not a grip. Not the wrist.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Put your hand flat on the bench. Fingers spread a little.*
>
> *I'm going to press down on the back of your hand for three seconds. Alright? (Wait for the yes. Then press — flat palm, straight down, three seconds. Count them silently. Not a squeeze, never the wrist.)*
>
> *Feel that. Feel the wood through your palm. Feel the temperature of it — the bench is colder than*

your hand, and you can feel exactly the line where the two of them meet.

And as you feel that line, there's nothing to lift. Nothing to force. Your hand can stay exactly where it is, doing what it's already doing, which is nothing at all.

And the more you feel the wood, the more the wood feels you. (Lift your own hand away slowly. Don't announce it. Let her discover it.)

Some part of that hand has stopped listening to the rest of you.

I'm not pressing any more.

Now try to lift it. Try. (Two seconds.)

And notice where the trying goes. Whether it gets as far as your fingers or stops somewhere up in your shoulder — either way, you'll know.

(Ordinary voice again:) Stop. It's yours. Lift it up.

If it doesn't come The hand comes straight off the bench. "Good — that's a working hand." Then use her: "Put your hand here, palm up. Tom, yours on top." Now she is the surface for the next attempt, which puts her inside the routine rather than outside it, and which nobody in the circle reads as a consolation.

6.8 The Name That Slips

ROUTINE 6.8 — The Name That Slips

What it is For a few seconds her own first name won't come out.
How long 60 seconds
What you need Nothing, but a quieter pocket than the others need —
this is the one card where she has to hear every word.
Prerequisite Two clear passes. This is the last opener and the first real number.

The other seven tests all worked on muscle. This one works on retrieval, which is exactly why it sits here at the end: if a word will go missing for eight seconds on a campsite, then everything in Chapter 10 is already available to you tonight, and you no longer need to wonder.

Say it exactly like this:

> *What's your first name? (Ordinary voice. Ordinary question. She answers. This is the one card here that can genuinely bother somebody: not on anyone who looked uncomfortable at any point in the earlier tests, and never as a first-contact stunt on someone you met four minutes ago.)*
>
> *Say it again.*
>
> *Once more — and this time listen to it while you say it.*
>
> *Good. Now hold on to it, right where you can see it. And I'm going to take it. (One snap of your fingers beside her ear. Thirty centimetres away, not at it, and not behind her head.)*

Gone.

And it's not that you've forgotten it. You know it perfectly well. It's just not where you left it — like a word on the tip of your tongue that you can hear the shape of but can't quite get hold of.

Nothing to force. Trying pushes it further back, and you already know that from your own tongue.

What's your name? (She hesitates, or laughs, or starts the first syllable and stops. Two seconds. Only push further if she is still smiling — the moment the smile goes, you stop, ordinary voice, no explanation, and you give her the name back.)

Try to say it. Try.

(Fifteen seconds maximum — under, not around, and count them yourself. Then plainly, warmly, no theatre:) Alright — here it is. It's yours. (Snap once.) What's your name?

She says it. The restoring is spoken out loud, every time, and then comes the part most people skip:

"Say it once more, so it's properly back in your mouth."

And then the frame, in your own words, immediately, before her friends supply a worse one: **"You didn't lose anything. You put it down for eight seconds because I asked you to, and you picked it straight back up."**

If it doesn't come She says her name instantly and cheerfully. "Course you do — some people have it welded

on." Then try the small version: "Count to ten out loud and leave out the seven." That lands on a fair number of people the name misses, and it is short enough that a second miss costs nothing. If both die, that's the end of the sequence. Don't fish for a third.

Reading the Board — Picking From What You Just Saw

Run three tests, not eight. Eight is a demonstration of your material and it exhausts the circle. Three is a measurement.

The standard battery is **6.1, 6.4, 6.2** — one drift test, one visual test that survives noise, one lock. Three different families, about thirty-five seconds each, under two minutes for the whole thing including the laughing.

Then the grid, and it is deliberately crude:

Two clear responses out of three — that is your person tonight. Do not keep testing to be sure. Certainty is not available and looking for it costs you the moment. Take her to Chapter 7 while the third test is still funny.

One out of three — useful, but as a second, not as your lead. These people do well in the small-circle routines where the group carries some of the load and nobody is standing alone in the middle. Keep them for Chapter 11.

Zero out of three — not tonight's lead. Not a verdict on the person, a verdict on the next twenty minutes.

Then read three things the grid does not capture.

Speed. A response that arrives inside three seconds is worth more than a bigger response that arrives after twenty. Lag is the single best predictor you get on a campsite, because everything you want to do later is on a clock.

The glance. Watch whether she looks at you before each move. The ones who check in are the ones who will follow instructions in the dark with their eyes shut. The ones who never look at you are running their own show, and you will be a guest in it.

When the laugh comes. A laugh half a second *after* the effect is the best sound in this whole business. A laugh *before* the effect is a person managing her own embarrassment in advance, and embarrassment management uses the same attention you were hoping to borrow.

And the trap, which is so reliable I plan around it: the loudest yes is usually the worst volunteer. The man who shouts *do me, do me, I'm really suggestible* is performing, and performing is the precise opposite of what any of this needs. The person you want is nearly always the quiet one who put her hands up the first time you asked and did not need asking twice.

Four tests per person is the ceiling. After the fourth, whatever happens is politeness rather than response, and politeness looks exactly like a pass right up until the moment you build an induction on it.

And the person who scored zero. He is standing right there and everybody watched. What you do in the next ten seconds decides whether that group stays

open to you for the rest of the weekend.

(A low scorer is not a strong-minded person and not a hardened skeptic. Those are stories people tell about themselves afterwards, and they are the polite ones. He is a person whose response wants a longer runway than a field at midnight is going to give you.)

Four things work, in this order:

Give him a job with status. Catcher, counter, timekeeper, the one who holds the phone torch at the right angle. Real jobs, publicly assigned, done in front of the same people who watched him not sway. "You count out loud from ten. Slowly. If you go fast you'll ruin it" — and now he is a man with a responsibility rather than a man who failed a test.

Let him run one. Hand him the finger vise on his own friend and feed him the lines a phrase at a time. People remember doing it far longer than they remember having it done, and there is no version of that evening where he goes home feeling left out.

Name it once, then drop it. "You're a hard one. Hard ones are useful — stand here." Said once, lightly, in front of everyone, and never mentioned again. What you must not do is explain, apologise, or theorise about why it did not work. Every extra sentence makes it larger.

Do not come back to him twice. Two attempts across an evening is interest. Three is pressure, and a group reads pressure off you a good deal faster than you notice you are applying it.

When It Goes Wrong

She fakes it. Too fast, too big, and she checks the audience halfway through the movement. That last one is the tell — a real response does not look for its reviews. Do not call it out, ever, not even kindly. Take her hands down, say thank you, and simply do not use her for the induction. Faking is not malice. It is somebody trying to be a good guest at your thing, and if you expose her the whole circle learns that being generous with you is dangerous.

She responds hard and then gets frightened. Hands locked, breathing goes shallow, and the face changes. Drop every word of the script instantly. Ordinary voice, ordinary volume, ordinary content: "Stop. Look at me. Open your hands. Good — what did you have for dinner?" Nothing mysterious in your tone, no soothing hypnotic cadence, because the cadence is the thing that is frightening her. Thirty seconds of completely normal conversation, then let her sit down and let somebody she knows talk to her. You do not run another test on that person tonight, and you do not explain what happened. You did not diagnose anything and you are not qualified to.

Her friend interferes. He grabs her arm mid-test, or shouts in her ear, or starts loudly doing the finger vise on himself two feet away. You have two moves. Recruit him — hand him the catcher job, the counting job, the torch — because a man with a task stops sabotaging within about four seconds. If he will not take a task, you are finished with that group, and finished is a decision you make deliberately at minute two rather than one you get forced into at minute nine.

She is drunker than she looked standing still. This shows up during the tests more often than before them, because the tests require holding two instructions at once. Ask her something with a two-part answer — "which of you two got here first, and how long did it take?" — and watch whether both halves survive to the end of her sentence. If they do not, close the sequence yourself, cleanly, with no diagnosis out loud: "That's enough for tonight, you two are far too entertaining." No further tests, and no induction. Not a moral position. She would give you unreliable responses, remember none of it in the morning, and her friends would remember all of it.

Something stays stuck after you released it. The hands stay laced, the eyes stay shut, and there is a beat where your stomach drops. Do not repeat the release word louder — volume is the one thing that reliably makes this worse. Change channel instead. Announce a touch, take her hand, and put ordinary content in her ears: "Give me that hand. Good. What time did you get here today?" The lock runs on attention and attention has just moved. In every case I have seen or caused, it comes apart inside twenty seconds, and the reason it comes apart is that you stopped being interesting.

It works far too well. You run a hand magnet and her eyes close, her head drops, and she goes quiet — on the opener, before you have done anything. That is a person who was already most of the way there when she walked over. Do not celebrate and above all do not run three more tests on her; you will spend a good response on a measurement. Either go straight to Chapter 7 or bring her back properly right now: name, day of the week, both eyes open, sixty seconds of

standing about before she walks anywhere near the fire or the guy ropes. Waking up is not optional because nothing official happened.

Your voice climbs. Ten people gather to watch your first test and you start projecting to the back row. Every one of them is now an audience member and none of them is a volunteer, and the woman in front of you can hear that you are performing at her. Correct it by dropping your volume below where it was, turning your shoulders so you are talking to her alone, and letting the circle lean in. A circle that leans in is quieter than a circle you shout over. And you test one person at a time. Two at once belongs in Chapter 11 and it needs a structure you have not built yet.

Nothing lands, with anybody, all night. It happens. Some fields are dead — too late, too cold, too wet, everyone an hour past their peak and forty minutes from their tent. That is the arithmetic and it is not a comment on you. But do check the honest thing before you blame the field: if you have had two beers, your timing is worse than it feels from in here. Pauses go first. You start filling three seconds of silence with a sentence, and that sentence is precisely the one that gives her something to disagree with.

The tests cost thirty seconds each. That is the entire reason they exist — they are cheap enough to lose, and you will lose most of them.

Chapter 7 — Rapid Inductions Without a Chair

It is twenty past midnight and Jule is standing on grass, holding a cup she stopped drinking from four minutes ago, waiting for you to do the thing you just said you could do. There is no chair. There is no chair anywhere in this field except the white plastic one outside the beer tent, and somebody's rucksack is on it. Eleven metres behind her there is a fire. To her left, at ankle height, four guy lines she cannot see and has already tripped over once tonight.

Every induction ever written was written for a room. Somebody sits down, somebody leans back, the head finds a rest, the arms find armrests, and the operator gets fifteen quiet minutes. You have none of that. What you have is a person standing upright on uneven ground, a bass drum from the main stage, and roughly three minutes before one of her friends says something.

An induction does one job. It narrows attention onto a single thing, and then it removes the work of holding that thing up. That is the whole mechanism. It is not sleep, it is not unconsciousness, it is not switching anybody off. *(No, she is not asleep. Nobody in this book is ever asleep.)* Everything that comes later — the arm that will not bend, the number that goes missing, the name that has gone somewhere — runs on the same two conditions: her attention is narrow, and she has stopped auditing every sentence before it lands.

Outdoors, fast beats slow, and not because fast is more impressive.

You are renting attention, not owning it. Something will happen. A friend shouts her name. A bottle goes over. The wind turns and puts smoke in her face. Indoors you get twenty uninterrupted minutes. On a campsite you get somewhere between forty seconds and four minutes before the field interrupts you. Build everything for four.

Cold wins arguments. At one in the morning it is nine degrees and she is in a t-shirt. A twelve-minute induction on a cold person is competing with shivering, and shivering does not lose.

The audience has a clock. Three friends are standing around with phones. Ten minutes gives them nine minutes to get bored and start narrating. Under two minutes they are still watching.

Everyone's evening is on a downward curve. Whatever you intend to do tonight, do it two hours earlier than you think. The condition test from Chapter 3 is not a formality you clear once — a person who could hold a question and its answer at ten o'clock may not be able to at half past one, and the same test applies again every single time you start.

(Speed is not depth. The two are unrelated. A fast drop only gets you to the work sooner.)

There are exactly three positions a body takes on a campsite, and each one needs a different induction. **Standing** — on grass, in the open, with people watching. **Sitting on a beer bench** — feet on the ground, no backrest, the body doing a small permanent

job to stay upright. **Lying in a tent doorway or on a foam mat** — legs out, head low, no audience. A technique built for one of these three does not transfer to the others by turning the volume up. Standing needs a catcher and a short script. Sitting needs a contact point. Lying needs your voice to slow down to somebody else's breathing.

Five inductions follow. They are deliberately from five different families, because a book with five versions of the same trick is a book with one trick in it.

The Catcher

Read this section before you use any of the five cards standing up. It is not a caution paragraph. It is a piece of equipment.

A standing induction ends with a person whose knees have gone soft, on ground you did not choose, in the dark. You do not catch that person yourself. You are in front of her, both your hands are busy, and you will be looking at her face. You need a second person behind her whose only job for the next three minutes is her spine.

Where he stands. Forty centimetres behind her heels, offset fifteen centimetres to one side — not squarely behind, or he cannot step in without walking into the backs of her legs. Knees soft, feet apart, weight forward. Hands up at the height of her shoulder blades, palms towards her, not touching. Not folded, not in pockets, not holding a beer. If your volunteer is heavier than you can comfortably lower on your own, use two

catchers at forty-five degrees behind each shoulder, and tell them which one leads, because two people improvising at the same time is worse than one.

She knows he is there. This is not a surprise element. Say it to her in front of him: *"Tobi is standing behind you. That is on purpose and it is not a prediction."*

What you say to the catcher. Do this out of her hearing if the ground allows it, and say it to his face, not over your shoulder.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Stand there. Forty centimetres behind her heels, a bit to the left, not straight behind — you want to be able to step in without hitting the backs of her legs.*
>
> *Hands up at her shoulder blades. Don't touch her. Don't hover so close she can feel your breath.*
>
> *If she goes back, you take her under both arms and you go down to the ground with her. You do not try to hold her up. You are not catching a sack of cement — you are kneeling down with a person. Your job is that her head does not hit anything, that is the entire job.*
>
> *If nothing happens for two minutes, you stay exactly where you are anyway. The moment you decide it's over is the moment it happens.*
>
> *And if you think something is wrong before I do, say my name once, loudly. I'll stop, no argument, no questions."*

He repeats none of it back and you do not ask him to. You watch where his hands go. If they end up in his pockets in the next thirty seconds, pick somebody else.

Ground you never do this on. Asphalt, gravel paths, the wooden duckboards by the toilets, the concrete strip in front of the water taps. Anywhere within three metres of a fire ring, and never with the fire behind her, because a person going backwards goes backwards. Anywhere inside the spread of tent guy lines — a peg is twenty-five centimetres of steel at ankle height and it is invisible at night. Any slope you can notice while walking across it. Anywhere with glass, and on the second night of a festival there is glass everywhere, so use your phone light and look.

Walk it first. Before you start, walk the two metres behind where she will stand. With your own feet. Every time, including on ground you walked ten minutes ago, because people put things down.

Nobody is left in it. Every card that follows ends in one of two places: a deepener, or the way back out. Never in the grass on her own while you take a photo. The full reorientation and the fully-awake buffer are Chapter 14, and they are not optional — you bring somebody all the way back and you keep her sitting for a minute before she stands up, walks near a fire, or goes looking for her tent in the dark. Nobody drives afterwards. Not one kilometre.

And the touch rule, since four of the five cards involve contact: hand, wrist, shoulder. Announced before it happens, in a form that leaves room for no. Nothing else, at any point, for any reason.

7.1 The Interrupted Greeting

ROUTINE 7.1 — The Interrupted Greeting

What it is A handshake that never completes. The volunteer's arm is left holding itself up with no instruction, and the instruction that arrives instead is yours.
How long 25 seconds from contact. Two minutes with the frame.
What you need Your two hands. A catcher. Four square metres of grass.
Prerequisite A clean yes, out loud. Ideally one passed opener from Chapter 6 — this works far better on somebody who has already felt her own fingers stick together.

The mechanics are boring and that is why they work. Shaking hands is a routine your body runs without supervision — the hand goes out, the grip happens, two pumps, release, done, and nobody has consciously piloted a handshake since they were nine. Interrupt it halfway and there is a gap. Not a mystical gap. A procedural one: the sequence has stopped, the next step has not arrived, and for about a second and a half attention goes looking for what to do. You put an instruction in that second and a half.

Everything else in this card is timing.

Set the frame first. She stands with her feet where she would stand waiting to be served at a bar — not together, not braced. Catcher in place per the section above. Then, and only then, ask for the touch.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"I'm going to take your wrist in a second. Just the wrist, nothing else. If you'd rather I didn't, say so now and we'll do something with your hands instead."*

(Wait for the yes. Out loud, not a nod. A nod is what people give when they haven't decided.)

Then break your own rhythm. Drop the topic, half-turn away as though you are done, and come back with the greeting.

Say it exactly like this:

"Alright — nice to meet you properly."

(Offer your right hand, palm vertical, at the height of her navel, not her chest. Low, so that reaching for it costs her a small amount of balance. Move at normal speed. Look at her eyes, not at her hand.)

The moment her hand comes towards yours, do not shake it. Take her wrist with your left hand from underneath, lift her forearm up and slightly across to eye height, and turn her palm towards her own face. Your right hand keeps going, past her hand, and lands flat on the shoulder furthest from you — the one you already announced. Now speak, and do not leave a pause before you do.

Say it exactly like this:

"Look at your hand.

That's it — right at the back of your own hand, and while you're looking at it, your arm is holding a weight it doesn't need to hold, and you don't have to do anything about that.

Nothing to force. Nothing to help with.

And the longer you look at it, the more of that weight your arm hands over to me — you might notice which finger lets go first.

Some part of you started putting that arm down before I said anything."

(Four seconds. Watch the fingers, not the face. When any finger moves, or when the forearm stops resisting the small lifts you are giving it — go.)

(Pull the wrist down and towards her own hip. Ten centimetres, brisk, not a yank. Same instant: press down through the flat of your right hand on the shoulder. Say the word at speaking volume, the volume you'd use to tell somebody the bar has moved.)

"Down.

All the way — and let your head go wherever it wants to go.

Whether that went all at once or in two goes, either way you can feel where it stopped. Nothing to hold up now. Nothing to keep straight."

(Keep the hand on the shoulder for three seconds after she has stopped moving. Not two. The hand leaving too early puts the job back on her.)

That single hard word is the one place in the one-on-one work where the voice gets firm, and it is firm because of timing, not because of dominance. It is a full stop, not a command. The sentence before it is permissive and the sentence after it is permissive. Shout it and you are doing the campfire show in front of one person, which is the fastest way to look like somebody who has watched videos.

From here you go straight into a deepener — Chapter 9 — or straight back out. You do not stand there admiring it.

If it doesn't come She shakes your hand. Or she looks at her hand, says "okay?", and stays entirely upright.

Do not repeat it and do not say "let's try that again". A second attempt on the same person in the same minute teaches her that the first one was supposed to do something and didn't.

Complete the handshake she originally offered, keep hold of her hand for one beat longer than normal, and reframe forwards.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good — you're one of the ones who wants to see it work before you'll hand anything over. That's not a problem, that's just the order it happens in for you.*
>
> *Come and sit down. I want to show you something you can do with your own hands, and then we'll come back to this."*

Then take her to a bench and run an opener from Chapter 6. About half the people who do not drop standing will drop sitting eight minutes later, and the eight minutes are what did it.

Honest arithmetic, from my own field and not from anybody's study: out of ten people who have already passed a test visibly — a Chapter 6 opener the person standing next to her could see happen, not simply ten who said a clear yes — I get a clean drop from about four. Four more go halfway and catch themselves. Two stand there looking at their hand. That is not a bad night, that is the number.

Note which ten those are, because the number is worthless without them. Out of ten who only said yes, about four pass an opener that visibly in the first place. So the rate climbs at every stage of the evening, and not because you got better between one card and the next — the group sorts itself. Everybody who was never going anywhere tonight has already stopped walking with you by the time you get here.

7.2 The Shoulder Drop

ROUTINE 7.2 — The Shoulder Drop

What it is A single hand resting on one shoulder becomes the place
the volunteer's weight goes. When the hand leaves, the weight has nowhere to go but down.
How long 90 seconds. Slower is fine.
What you need One hand. A beer bench, a cool box, a log, a kerb.
Prerequisite A clean yes. No catcher needed — she is already sitting.

This is the most reliable card in the chapter and the one to start your career on. Nothing is interrupted, nothing is timed to a fraction of a second, nothing depends on you reading a micro-signal in the dark. If you learn one induction before your first festival, learn this one, and run it thirty times before you attempt 7.1 on anybody.

It works on a bench because a bench has no back. A person on a beer bench has been doing a small continuous job for the last two hours — a set of postural muscles holding a torso upright — and has not thought about it once. That job is real, it is verifiable,

and it is free pacing truth. You are not inventing a sensation. You are naming one that is already happening and then offering somewhere to put it.

The single contact point is the whole design. One hand, one place, no movement. Attention parks where it is touched. Two hands, or a hand that strokes or squeezes or drifts, splits attention and turns the induction into a massage, which is a different and unwelcome thing.

Set-up. She sits, both feet flat, palms on her thighs or loose in her lap. You stand at forty-five degrees to her side, not in front of her and not behind. Your hand goes on the outer shoulder — the far one, so your arm is not across her face.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Feet flat, both of them.*
>
> *I'm going to put my hand flat on your shoulder and leave it there. It stays there, it doesn't do anything else. If you'd rather it didn't, say so and I'll do this without touching you at all."*

(Wait for the yes. Then place the hand. Flat, whole palm, about two hundred grams of pressure — the weight of a full cup, not a push. Once it is down it does not move again until the end.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *"There it is. Just the weight of a hand.*
>
> *And a bench like this has no back to it — so your body has been doing a small job the whole time you've been sitting here, keeping you upright, and you've never once given it a thought.*

Now, as you feel exactly where my hand is sitting, your shoulder can let a little of its own weight join it — and you don't have to decide how much."

(Pause. Six seconds. Say nothing. Beginners lose this one by talking through the gap.)

"The more of your weight my hand takes, the less your back has to do.

And you'll notice it somewhere else first — in the jaw, or behind the eyes, whichever one gets there first for you.

Your eyes can close whenever they've had enough of the fire. They don't have to yet.

Some part of you knows exactly how to sit here without holding anything up. It's done it every night this week."

(Wait for the eyes. If they close, keep going. If they don't, keep going anyway — this card does not need them shut to work.)

"Nothing to force. Nothing to get right.

And each breath out puts a bit more of you into the bench and a bit less of you into keeping upright."

(Now the release. Lift your hand straight off — clean, the way you'd take a glass off a table, not a slow peel. Say it as it leaves, not after.)

"And down.

Everything that was leaning on my hand goes into the bench now.

And whether that went all the way or halfway, either way you'll notice where it settled."

(Do not touch her again. The hand does not come back. If she leans sideways, that is what the person sitting on her other side is for — put someone there before you start.)

If it doesn't come Nothing settles. She's sitting up as straight as she was ninety seconds ago and she smiles at you.

Turn the release into the point of the exercise. Nobody in the circle knows what was supposed to happen, and you are about to tell them it already did.

Say it exactly like this:

"Feel the difference in that shoulder now that the hand's gone? That's the bit most people never notice.

Keep sitting like that for a moment. That's the position we want anyway."

Then move to an arm-heaviness opener from Chapter 6 without pausing, using the same shoulder. You have lost nothing, you have set up a contact point she is already used to, and you have told the truth: a shoulder does feel different after a hand comes off it.

7.3 Counting Through The Noise

ROUTINE 7.3 — Counting Through The Noise

What it is A count down that rides the kick drum from the main stage. The thing you can't get rid of becomes the metronome.
How long 45 to 70 seconds, depending on the tempo.
What you need Audible four-to-the-floor bass. A seated volunteer.
Prerequisite A clean yes, and a set you can actually hear the pulse of. Useless during an acoustic act.

Utilisation is the only principle in this book worth calling a principle, so here it is once and then never again as theory.

The amateur move outdoors is to fight the environment: shout over the bass, move away from the noise, wait for a lull. The lull is not coming and the noise is not the problem. The bass from the main stage is loud, it is regular, it is not going anywhere for two hours, and — this is the part that matters — it does not require her agreement. She can hear it. You can hear it. That is a fact her body cannot argue with, which makes it the cheapest pacing truth available on the entire site. Everything you would call an interruption is, if you name it before it names itself, a fact you both already agree on.

So you do not count against the beat. You count on it.

The tempo problem, solved with numbers. A main-stage set sits somewhere between 124 and 130 beats per minute. That is roughly two kicks a second — far too fast to hang a number on each one. So you take every fourth kick. One number per bar, which lands you at roughly one number every two seconds, which is exactly the pace a slow count wants to be. Find the bar

by listening for where the snare or clap sits — it lands between the kicks you want. Say the number *on* the impact, not after it. A number that arrives a quarter of a second late is a number she has to wait for, and waiting is attention.

Set-up. She sits. You sit or crouch at her side, close enough to speak at conversational volume into the space beside her ear without leaning across her. If you have to shout, this card is not on tonight.

Say it exactly like this:

"Hear the kick from the main stage?"

(Wait for the nod. Then wait one full bar more before you say anything. That empty bar is the first time she listens to it on purpose.)

"Right. It's not going anywhere for the next two hours, so we're going to use it instead of shouting over it.

Every fourth one, I'm going to say a number. You don't have to count with me. You don't have to do anything with them at all — they're just going past.

Eyes closed when you're ready."

(Now count. One number per bar, on the kick. Keep your volume flat — do not get quieter as you go, that is a trick from a room with carpet and out here it means she stops hearing you.)

Say it exactly like this:

"Twenty.

Nineteen — and each one lands somewhere a little lower than the one before.

Eighteen.

Seventeen. Nothing to force, nothing to keep track of.

Sixteen.

Fifteen — and the more of them go past you, the less any single one needs your attention.

Fourteen.

Thirteen.

Twelve. Somewhere around here people stop bothering to follow. You don't have to notice which one that was.

Eleven.

Ten. That one arrived without you.

Nine.

Eight — and the bass is doing all the work now, so your shoulders can stop.

Seven.

Six.

Five. Whether the numbers run out before you do or the other way round, either way you'll notice how far down four already is.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One. Down."

(Say "Down" on the kick like every other number. Not louder. The rhythm is what carried the whole thing and breaking it at the last moment throws it away.)

When the DJ takes the beat out. He will. Somewhere around your count of eleven the drums drop out for a build, and beginners panic and speed up. Do not. Use it — the silence is a better event than the beat was.

Say it exactly like this:

"And it's gone quiet. Stay exactly where you are.

When it comes back, it comes back lower than it left."

(Then wait. The drop lands on its own and you say the next number on it. The whole field will shout at that moment. So will your volunteer's friends. She has just been told in advance that it goes lower, and there is nothing to do but let the field confirm it.)

If it doesn't come You reach one and she opens her eyes and says "was that it?"

The count was never the point, so tell her what the point was.

Say it exactly like this:

"That's the one. Most people spend a whole festival with that noise happening at them. You just spent a minute with it happening for you.

Do that again on your own on the walk back and you'll get further with it than you did with me talking."

That is true, it costs her nothing, and it hands her something she can use, which is a better exit than an apology. Then, if the circle is still with you, go to 7.2 on the same bench.

7.4 Fire Fixation

ROUTINE 7.4 — Fire Fixation

What it is A slow eye fixation on one point in a fire, where the eyes close because they are tired of being open.
How long 4 to 7 minutes. This one is not in a hurry.
What you need A fire. A seated volunteer at a safe distance. A circle
that has already gone quiet.
Prerequisite A clean yes. Wrong before midnight. Wrong with an audience that is still talking.

This is the only slow induction in the book and the reason is not atmosphere.

A rapid induction is an interruption. It works because there is a running pattern to interrupt — a handshake, a conversation, a posture. At half past one, in a circle that has already gone quiet, in front of a fire that eight people have been staring into for forty minutes, there is nothing left to interrupt. Everybody there is already narrow, already slow, already halfway. Walking into that and doing something abrupt is not impressive, it reads as an intrusion, and the circle closes against you in one second flat. Slow reads as continuation. That is the entire argument, and it is a timing argument, not a

taste one.

Fire is also a genuinely good fixation object, for reasons that are not romantic. It moves irregularly, so the eye cannot settle into a pattern and go elsewhere. It is warm on the face, which is a real sensation you can name truthfully as many times as you like. And staring at it makes eyes water and blink — because of smoke, heat, and the plain mechanical fact of holding eyelids open — which hands you a stream of real events to pace. *(The flame is not doing anything. Fire is warm and it moves. That is the whole mechanism.)*

Safety, specific to this card. She sits — on the ground, a log, a bench, anything, but she sits. Nobody does a standing anything near a fire. Not less than one and a half metres from the fire ring, and you position yourself so that she is never between you and the flames. Check where the smoke is going before you begin and move her if it is going into her face, because you will not be able to move her comfortably afterwards. Her hands stay in her lap or on her knees, not propping her up behind her, so that when she goes soft she folds forwards into her own lap and not backwards. Somebody sober sits on each side of her. And whatever is on the ground beside her — cup, bottle, lighter, phone — you move it out of the way now, quietly, before you say a word.

Set-up. You sit next to her, not opposite. Your voice comes from beside her, at the volume you would use to say something to one person while other people are asleep nearby.

Say it exactly like this:

"Pick one place in there. Not the whole fire — one spot.

Where the flame comes off the end of that left-hand log is a good one, but pick your own. Tell me when you've got it."

(Wait. However long it takes. When she says she has it, wait another ten seconds and say nothing at all. If you fill that gap you are doing your job and hers.)

Say it exactly like this:

"Good. Now your eyes stay on that one place, and everything else can do whatever it likes.

The heat on your face is real — you don't have to imagine that one.

The log under you. The cold on your back where the fire isn't reaching.

And as you keep looking at that one spot, the edges of everything else can go soft, and you don't have to help them do it."

(Pause. Twelve seconds. Watch for the first long blink.)

"Your eyes are going to water a bit. That's smoke and heat and the plain fact of holding them open — nothing more interesting than that.

And when they water, you can blink. And a blink can take a little longer than you meant it to."

(Pause. Wait for a blink. Speak on the way out of it.)

"There's one.

And the more times they close, the less reason there is to open them all the way again.

You might notice one of them getting there before the other does."

(Pause. Twenty seconds if you can stand it. This card is mostly silence and beginners cannot bear that. Count in your head if you have to.)

"Nothing to force. Nothing to keep going.

Some part of you decided about ten minutes ago that it was finished for the night. It's been waiting for the rest of you to catch up.

So — whether they close on this next blink or the one after it, either way you can let the last one be the one that stays shut."

(Wait. Do not count down, do not say "sleep", do not touch her. When the eyes have stayed closed for more than two seconds — and only then:)

"And that's it.

Everything the fire was doing, it can carry on doing without you watching it.

The warmth stays. The sound of it stays. You don't."

Then the deepener, or the way back. Do not sit there in silence congratulating yourself, and do not let the circle start whispering — say quietly to the person on her other side, *"Stay where you are and don't talk to her,"* and they will hold that line for you.

If it doesn't come Seven minutes in, her eyes are open, she's still looking at the log, and she says her eyes hurt.

The fire did most of the talking, so let the fire keep it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Then close them. You've been staring at a fire for ten minutes, they've earned it.*
>
> *Stay like that. Don't do anything else — I'm going to stop talking now."*

(Then actually stop talking. Two minutes. Nobody in the circle knows the difference between an induction that worked and a person sitting quietly with her eyes closed by a fire at two in the morning, and neither of those two things is a failure.)

If she is still awake and chatty after that, she is not going tonight, and there is no version of this where saying so out loud helps anybody. Move the conversation on.

7.5 The Breath Ladder

ROUTINE 7.5 — The Breath Ladder

What it is You put your sentences into her out-breaths and then let the sentences get longer. One rung per breath.
How long 5 to 8 minutes.
What you need Your voice and somewhere for her to lie down.
Prerequisite A clean yes. One person, from your own group, no audience. Never a stranger, never alone in the dark.

This is the quietest card in the book and it has the narrowest conditions. Read them before the script.

Who this is for. Somebody from your own group. At her own tent or on a mat by the fire, with the doorway open, with at least one other person awake within sight, and at a time she chose. Not a stranger. Not somebody you have just met. Not somebody sitting alone at night whom you have approached — that is a rule from Chapter 3 and it does not bend because the technique is gentle. Gentleness is not consent. The technique being soft is exactly why the frame around it has to be hard.

Where you are. Sitting up, at her side, an arm's length away, facing the same direction she is. Not leaning over her, not kneeling at her head, not in the doorway blocking it. If you can move so that she can see the sky and you are in the edge of her vision rather than the middle of it, do that.

The mechanic. Breathing is the only thing in this book that is already rhythmic, already involuntary, and already hers. You do not instruct it. You do not say "breathe deeply" — the moment you do, she is running her lungs on purpose and the whole advantage is gone. You follow. You speak only while she is breathing out, and you go silent while she breathes in, and after four or five cycles you make your out-breath sentences slightly longer, so her exhale stretches a little to fit around them. That is the ladder. One rung per breath, and she builds every rung.

How to see the breath in the dark. Not the chest — you cannot read a chest in the dark without staring at it, and staring at somebody lying down is its own problem. Watch the top edge of the sleeping bag, or the line of the shoulder against the light from the fire, or

the hand resting on her stomach. Pick one, and once you have picked it, look at nothing else.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Don't change anything about your breathing. I'm just going to talk in the gaps."*

(Now wait through three full breaths before you say another word. Three, not one. You are learning her tempo and she is learning that you are not going to fill every space.)

(From here: speak only on the way out. Silence on the way in. Every time.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That one out ..."*
>
> *(silence for the in-breath)*
>
> *"... and this next one can be a little longer than it was going to be."*
>
> *(silence)*
>
> *"Nothing to force. You've done this every night of your life without instructions."*
>
> *(silence)*
>
> *"And each time the air leaves, whatever it takes with it can stay gone until the morning."*
>
> *(silence)*
>
> *"Rung by rung — and the more of them go past, the less any single one of them matters."*
>
> *(silence)*

"Your legs are heavier than your arms right now. Or the other way round. You don't have to work out which."

(silence)

"Some part of you stopped listening to the actual words about three breaths ago, and is doing fine without them."

(silence — a long one now, two full cycles)

"And whether the next one is the last one you notice, or the one after that — either way there's no wrong step on this ladder."

(From here you can stop adding and simply speak on every second exhale, saying almost nothing: "That's it." "And down one more." "Nothing to do." The words stop mattering around here; the placement is doing the work.)

And then you bring her back. This is the card where people do not. It is quiet, she is lying down, it is late, and it feels considerate to leave her there. Do not. She said yes to a piece of work and the work has two ends. Bring her all the way back up, sit with her for sixty seconds while she is properly awake and talking in full sentences, and then leave her to go to sleep on her own terms. Chapter 14 is the full version and it is not decorative.

If it doesn't come Ten minutes in, she's breathing perfectly normally, she's awake, and she says "sorry, I don't think it's working."

Nothing needs rescuing here, because nothing was claimed. Take the word "working" away and give it

back to her as something she keeps.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"There isn't a working. You've been lying still and breathing out slowly for ten minutes, which is more than you've done all week.*
>
> *Keep going for another minute after I stop. Then sleep."*

Then stop, sit for that minute, say goodnight, and go. Do not offer a second attempt at the tent door. If she wants it again she will ask you tomorrow, and if she asks you tomorrow it will work, because asking is most of it.

Which One, When

The decision is made on the ground in about four seconds, so it needs to be made on things you can see, not on things you would have to ask.

Start with the body, because the body has already chosen. If she is standing and there is nowhere to sit, you have 7.1 and nothing else. If she is on a bench, a log, a cool box or a kerb, you have 7.2 and, if the bass is loud enough, 7.3. If she is lying down, you have 7.5 and only 7.5, and you should be asking yourself whether this is a person you should be doing anything with at all. Do not move a person to fit a technique you like. Moving somebody from a bench to open grass so you can do the standing one costs you the frame, costs you thirty seconds, and gives her a walk during which she can think about whether she

really wants to.

Then the noise. If you can hear a clear four-to-the-floor pulse from where you are standing, 7.3 is available and it is the best card on the site, because it is the only one that gets stronger the louder it gets. If you have to raise your voice to be heard, take 7.3 and take nothing else — every other card here has quiet passages in it, and a quiet passage you have to shout is a joke. If it is quiet enough to hear the fire crackling, 7.3 is dead and 7.4 has just come alive.

Then the audience. Nobody watching: anything, and 7.5 becomes possible. Two or three people, standing, interested: 7.1, because it is short and because it looks like something. Six or more, seated, still talking to each other: 7.2, because it survives interruption — the hand stays on the shoulder while somebody laughs at something else, and you carry on. Six or more, seated, gone quiet: 7.4, and take your time with it. An audience that has gone quiet at a fire is the single best condition on this list and it happens perhaps twice a festival. Do not waste it on a fast trick.

Then the state of the person. Wide awake, curious, arms crossed, wants to see something: 7.1. Wide awake and cheerful but nothing has been demonstrated yet: 7.2, always, and stop trying to be clever. Tired, quiet, hunched, been up since six: 7.4 or 7.5 — a tired person cannot be startled into anything useful, but they will go a long way on very little. Cold and shivering: none of them. Get her a jumper and ask again in ten minutes, and if that sounds like an anticlimax, so does an induction competing with a shivering reflex.

And the person you skip. Anybody who cannot hold a question and its answer for thirty seconds. Anybody whose friends have volunteered her. Anybody who has told you about a heart condition, epilepsy, a psychiatric diagnosis, a recent bad thing, or a pregnancy. Anybody who says yes while looking at somebody else for permission. None of those are induction problems and none of them get solved by picking a different card.

The order to learn them in, which is not the order they are printed in. 7.2 first, thirty times. Then 7.4, because it teaches you to shut up. Then 7.3, because it teaches you timing against something you do not control. Then 7.5, because it teaches you to follow instead of lead. Then 7.1, last, when the other four have made you calm enough to do something fast without hurrying.

When It Goes Wrong

The induction does not take. This is not the rare case, it is the ordinary one, and the whole difference between somebody who runs these at a festival and somebody who ran them once is what comes out of your mouth in the two seconds afterwards.

Three rules first.

Never say "again". Not "let's try that again", not "one more time", not "okay, so this time". The word tells everybody standing there that there was a first time and it failed. There was no first time. There was a thing you did, and now there is the next thing you are

doing.

Never explain what was supposed to happen. The audience does not know. Your volunteer does not know. You are the only person in the field with a script, and the moment you describe the intended outcome you have created a failure that did not previously exist and then confessed to it.

Never blame her. Not out loud, not in a joke, not as "you're a difficult one, aren't you". It is untrue, it costs you the rest of the circle, and the person who has just been told she is bad at something will not volunteer again. *(You are not the reason it worked when it worked, either. You were the timekeeper.)*

Now the specific ones.

She stands there entirely upright, looking at her own hand, waiting. Complete the movement you started. Put her hand down yourself, gently, all the way to her side, as though that was the destination.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good — hold it right there. That's the position I wanted.*
>
> *Now close your eyes and tell me which hand feels heavier. Don't think about it, just say one."*

She will name one. Everybody names one, because a forced choice between two arms always produces an answer. You now have a heaviness you did not have four seconds ago, and you are in an opener from Chapter 6 with the circle believing this was the plan.

She laughs. Laughing is the most common way this fails and it is not hostile — she is standing in a field with people watching and she has run out of things to do with her face. Laugh once, briefly, with her, and then take the laugh as the material.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Yeah — that's the bit everybody laughs at.*
>
> *Right, keep laughing, I don't mind, but keep your feet exactly where they are while you do it."*

The instruction is easy, she complies with it, and compliance with an easy instruction is worth more right now than a drop would have been. Wait for the laugh to finish on its own — it always finishes faster than you expect — and go into 7.2 on the nearest bench.

She goes halfway and catches herself. Her knees dip, the head goes forward ten centimetres, and then she straightens up and looks embarrassed. Do not reach for her and do not comment on the recovery.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That's exactly it. You caught it on the way down — most people don't notice that far.*
>
> *Sit down here. It's easier when you're not also standing up."*

Then 7.2, immediately, on the same person. This is the recovery I get the most out of, because the halfway drop was real and she felt it, and all you have removed is the part of the job her legs were doing.

She closes her eyes and is obviously being polite. You can see it — eyelids fluttering, chin up, the face of somebody doing you a favour. Do not test her, do not push a deepener onto it, and above all do not pretend along with her, because the circle can see it as clearly as you can and you will be the only person there who is lying.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Open your eyes a second. You're helping me and you don't have to.*
>
> *Just sit there and don't do anything at all. I'll do the work."*

Naming it costs you nothing and buys back all your credibility in one sentence. Then go quiet for twenty seconds and start 7.2 properly, from the beginning, with the hand on the shoulder.

Her friend interrupts. Somebody says "she's not even under, mate", or pulls her arm, or waves a phone in her face. Address the friend, not the volunteer, and do it without heat.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You're right, she isn't. Nothing has happened yet.*
>
> *Stand there — I want you to watch her hands, not her face. Tell me if you see anything move."*

You have given the loudest person in the circle a job, which is the only thing that has ever worked on the loudest person in a circle. And you have told the literal truth, which means nothing you say afterwards has to be defended.

It works harder than you meant it to. She goes down faster than expected, or she does not come back up when you first speak to her, or she starts crying quietly. This is not a failure and it is not an emergency, and the way you behave in the next ten seconds is what everybody in that circle will remember about you. Do not raise your voice. Do not shake her. Do not announce anything to the audience. Sit down beside her, keep your voice at exactly the pitch it was at, and take the ordinary way back out — Chapter 14, the whole procedure, no shortcuts, no clever finish. Then sit with her for a full minute before she stands, and longer before she walks anywhere near the fire, the guy lines, or the dark.

And the last one, which is not about her at all.

Nothing works, all evening, with anybody. Four people in a row, no drops, a circle that has drifted off to talk about something else. There is no wording for this one. Stop. Not out of humility — out of arithmetic. A night where you are chasing it is a night where you are pushing, and pushing on a campsite at two in the morning is the thing this entire book exists to keep you from doing. Put it down, sit at the fire, and be a person at a festival. The field is still there on Saturday.

Chapter 8 — Convincers — Making It Undeniable

She sat down on the bench, closed her eyes on the second count, breathed slower than the music, and stayed like that for ninety seconds while four of her friends watched and nobody said anything. Good work. Then she opened her eyes, looked at me, and said the sentence that ends more evenings than rain does.

"I don't think anything happened."

And she was right. Nothing had been proven. She had been quiet, warm and agreeable on a bench, and quiet-warm-and-agreeable is also what happens to people at one in the morning when they finally sit down. Indoors this problem barely exists. A dim room, a heavy chair, a closed door and a clock you can hear — the room testifies for you. The setting is the evidence. Out here you have none of that. You have wind, a generator, someone's speaker two rows over playing something with a kick drum in it, and a woman whose entire frame of reference is *I sat down and got sleepy*.

So you give her something she cannot explain away in four seconds. That is a convincer.

A convincer is a small, self-evident event that the volunteer produces herself, notices herself, and cannot easily attribute to politeness or tiredness. Her arm stays in the air with no effort behind it. A number goes missing out of a count she is doing out loud. A word she uses every day is briefly not where she left it. None of these are large. All of them are *undeniable in the*

small way that matters, because she did them, not you.

Everybody I know who quit doing this outdoors quit at the same place. Not at the approach — the approach is easy, people are bored at three in the afternoon and they say yes more than you think. Not at the induction either. They quit because they got twelve people quiet and then had nothing to show them, and the silence after "I don't think anything happened" is a specific kind of cold. Indoors, the convincer is a garnish. On a field, it is the load-bearing wall. Build your evening around convincers and everything else — the deepeners, the routines, the whole twenty-minute set later in this book — has something to stand on.

8.0 The Double Addressee

Every convincer you run outdoors is spoken to two people at once, and they need different things.

The volunteer needs an *inner* event. Something she feels that she did not choose. She is not comparing you to a television show; she is comparing this moment to the last four minutes of her own life. Her bar is low and private: *did something shift?* She'll accept small. She'll accept ambiguous. What she will not accept is being told what she felt.

The ring around her needs an *outer* event. They cannot feel anything. They can only see. To them, "she says her hand feels warm" is worth nothing — half of them assume she's being nice to you. What counts for the ring is a body doing something a body does not usually do: an arm that stays up when it should fall, a hand that opens two seconds late, a count that

stumbles.

These two demands pull in opposite directions, and the beginner's mistake is to serve the ring and lose the volunteer. He goes for the biggest visible effect, announces it like a stunt, and the volunteer — who now has an audience and a task — starts *checking*. Checking is fatal. The moment she begins auditing her own arm, the arm belongs to the auditor again.

So the order is fixed, and it is not negotiable if you want this to work twice:

Serve the volunteer with your words. Serve the ring with your staging.

Everything you *say to her* stays permissive, small, and about noticing. Everything you *do* — where you stand, where you make her hands go, where you point the ring's eyes — is chosen so the visible part reads from three metres away in bad light. Stand at forty-five degrees to her, not in front of her, so she is never facing a wall of faces. Put her arm at chest height where the silhouette against the fire is clean. Tell the ring where to look, and tell them to look at something *other* than the headline event.

That last one is the trick worth the price of the chapter. When you tell twelve people "watch her arm", twelve people become arm inspectors and one of them will say "she's holding it up herself". When you tell them "watch her shoulders — not her arm", they see her shoulders drop on the out-breath, which almost always happens, and they read it as evidence of everything else. You have not lied. You have aimed them at the part of the picture that is reliable.

8.0.1 Why a Convincer Is Always Phrased as Awareness

Go back to the architecture in Chapter 2 and put a convincer through it, because this is where it bites hardest.

A convincer is the most tempting place in the whole craft to make a claim. The claim sounds strong. *In a moment you won't be able to open your eyes.* It has a drumroll in it. It also has a verdict in it, delivered by a jury of her friends, in about six seconds, and roughly one time in four that verdict goes against you in public.

The fix is not to be vaguer. The fix is structural. You move the sentence off the *event* and onto the *noticing* of the event, and you close the back door so no outcome counts as nothing.

Take the arm. The claim version is: **"Your arm is locked."** One testable proposition, one binary result, one witness for every friend she brought.

The built version stacks:

• **Truth she cannot refuse** — *"There's weight in that arm. There always is."* Her arm does have weight. Her body agrees before her head gets a vote.

• **A bridge** — *"and as you notice that weight…"* The true half carries the unprovable half across.

• **Permission** — *"…you don't have to hold it, and you don't have to drop it."* Nothing to perform. Nothing to fail.

• **Delegation** — *"…your arm can stay exactly where I left it."* The instruction goes to the arm. Not to her. She

cannot simultaneously let go and steer.

• **Awareness instead of prediction** — *"...and you'll notice how little it wants from you."* The doubt lands on the noticing, never on the event.

• **A gap she fills herself** — *"Some part of you already knows how to do nothing with a limb."* No actor, no yardstick, no measurement. She staffs the sentence with her own material.

• **A seal** — *"Whether it stays right there or drifts down an inch — either way you'll feel the difference between holding and being held."* Both branches are outcomes. Neither branch is failure.

Now count the ways that stack can fail in front of witnesses. There is one: nothing whatsoever happens and nobody notices anything, which is rare, and which has its own three rescues at the end of this chapter.

Say it out loud a few times before the festival, because it does not read the way it plays. On the page the built version looks longer and softer. Out of a mouth, at one in the morning, twenty centimetres from her ear, it lands harder than the claim — because the claim asks her to be impressed, and the built version asks her to look. People will do almost anything you ask them to look at.

(No, the arm is not locked. Muscles do not lock, and nothing has been switched off in her. She has simply stopped sending the instruction that would bring it down, and stopping is not the same as being unable.)

8.1 Arm Catalepsy

ROUTINE 8.1 — Arm Catalepsy

What it is You lift her arm, let go, and it stays where you left it. The most visible proof available to you outdoors.
How long 60 to 90 seconds
What you need Nothing. Her arm, and a metre of clear space on her right.
Prerequisite One passed opener from Chapter 6, or straight out of any
induction from Chapter 7. Never cold.

Position first. Stand at her side, not in front. If she is sitting on a bench, you want her forearm free of her thigh, which means you may have to move her a hand's width forward — do that before you start talking, not during.

Announce the touch. Every time, in plain language, with a real exit in it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"I'm going to lift your right hand by the wrist. If you'd rather I didn't, say so now and we'll do a different one — nothing lost."*

(Wait for the yes. If it's a shrug, it's not a yes. Ask again with words.)

Take the wrist from underneath with your first two fingers and thumb — underneath, so you are carrying, not gripping. Raise the arm slowly to chest height and stop. Not shoulder height: shoulder height fatigues in forty seconds and fatigue looks exactly like collapse. Chest height holds for three minutes.

Say it exactly like this:

"Good. There's weight in that arm — there always is, you're just not usually asked to notice it. (Take the weight fully. Let her feel that you have it.) And as you notice how much of it I'm holding right now, you don't have to help me, and you don't have to fight me. Nothing to force here at all.

Your arm can stay exactly where I leave it. Not because you're holding it. Because nobody's asked it to come down yet.

(Now let go — thumb first, then the index finger, then the middle finger last, roughly a second between each. Do not snatch your hand away. Move it eight centimetres and leave it there.)

And now, whatever's happening in that hand — the air on it, the pulse in it, whatever it is — just notice it. Some part of you already knows how to leave a thing where it is.

(Two seconds of silence. Not one. Let the ring see it.)

Whether it stays right there, or drifts down a couple of centimetres while you watch it — either way you get to feel the difference between holding something up and simply not putting it down."

Then bring it down yourself. Always. Take the wrist again, announce it, lower it to her thigh, and say something that closes the loop.

Say it exactly like this:

"I'll take that back now. (Take the wrist. Lower it all the way to her leg — don't leave it hovering.)

Arm's yours again. Move the fingers."

Do not leave an arm in the air as decoration while you talk to the crowd. It looks impressive for eleven seconds and then it becomes a problem you have to solve in front of people.

To the ring, while the arm is up, keep your voice at normal conversational volume and say one of these — not both:

"Watch her shoulders."

or

"Nobody's holding that."

Never "watch this". "Watch this" is a promise with your name on it.

If it doesn't come The arm sinks straight away, sometimes before your
hand is clear.

Do not re-lift it. Say, in a normal voice, without
a beat of hesitation:

"There it goes — that's the arm letting go first.
That's usually the one that goes first."

Then take the wrist, put the hand on her thigh
yourself, and move to 8.2 within five seconds.
Never say "let's try that again". You are not
trying, you are working through a list, and the
list moves forward.

Out of ten people I get this far with, the arm holds for seven or so, half-holds for two, and does nothing at all for one. Those are my numbers over more summers than I'd like to count, and yours will be worse for the

first fifty attempts. That is not failure. That is the arithmetic of standing on a field.

8.2 The Missing Number

ROUTINE 8.2 — The Missing Number

What it is She counts down out loud and one number is briefly not where she left it.
How long 90 seconds
What you need Nothing. Her eyes closed.
Prerequisite 8.1, or any induction. Works best as the second convincer,
not the first.

First, the number itself, because everyone gets this wrong.

Do not use seven. Seven is the number every half-drunk person at a campsite has heard about, usually from a video, usually with the phrase "and then you can't remember the number seven" attached to it. The moment you use it, you are running someone else's famous trick and she is watching for the seam.

Use four. Or three. Sometimes five. Two reasons, and only one of them is about fame.

The craft reason is momentum. She counts down from ten. If you take seven, the gap arrives on the third number, before the counting has any rhythm, while she is still an alert person doing a task — and then she has six more numbers to sit in, with time to notice, repair and comment. Take four and the picture inverts. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five come out on rails, and the gap arrives when the count is running itself. After the

gap there are three numbers left. The whole thing is over before her analytical department finishes rebooting.

The second reason: nobody has a story about the number four. Nobody has ever been told that four is the magic one. It arrives without a reputation.

If you are working through a group across the night, give each person a different number. They compare notes afterwards. Let them find that it was four for her and three for him — it costs you nothing and it removes the one explanation that would otherwise sink you.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Eyes closed, and count backwards out loud from ten. Slowly — one number per breath out, not faster. I'll be talking underneath you; you don't have to listen to me, and you don't have to not listen. Just keep counting.*
>
> *(Let her start. Ten. Nine. Time your lines to land on her out-breaths.)*
>
> *Good. And as those numbers come out, they get further apart… and heavier… and the more you say them the less work they take. (Eight. Seven.)*
>
> *Now — while you keep counting — I'm going to take the number four and put it in my pocket. (Say it flat and quick, on her exhale. Do not underline it. Do not pause after it.) You can leave it with me for a minute. It's safe there.*
>
> *(Six. Five.)*

And you'll notice, as you go, that one of these is further away than the others. You'll know which one when you get to it. Some part of you already knows which one it is.

(Let her hit the gap. Say nothing. Whatever she does — hesitates, skips, laughs, stops — say nothing for two full seconds.)

That one. That's the one. Whether it took a second to come back or it never turned up at all — either way you just felt what it's like to reach for something ordinary and find it's not there."

Then give it back. Out loud, immediately, before she opens her eyes.

Say it exactly like this:

"Four. It's yours again, it's back where it was, and it was never anywhere else. Say it once so we both hear it."

(She is not asleep — she is counting. People who are asleep do not count.)

If it doesn't come She counts straight through: ten to one, clean, no
hesitation, no gap.

Two rescues, in this order.

One: if there was any hesitation at all — a
stumble, a longer gap, a rise in pitch — name
exactly that, and nothing more:
"And notice how much longer that one took."
Only say this if it actually happened. If you
claim a hesitation that twelve people did not
hear, you have spent your credit for the night.

Two: if the count was genuinely clean, say: "Solid. Your counting doesn't come apart — that's useful, it means the next one will be cleaner." Then go to 8.3 immediately. Do not run the count a second time with a different number. Twice is a man hunting for a result, and everyone can see it.

(Nothing was erased. Nothing is ever erased. The number sat exactly where it always sat; she simply stopped reaching for it while she had something else to do.)

8.3 The Forgotten Word

ROUTINE 8.3 — The Forgotten Word

What it is An everyday word is briefly out of reach while she tries to describe the thing it names.
How long 60 seconds
What you need An ordinary object within arm's reach. A cup, a lighter,
a shoe.
Prerequisite 8.1 or 8.2 landed. This one goes second or third, never
first.

This is the gentler cousin of making someone lose their own name, and I want you to use this one instead. Losing your name is identity-adjacent, it frightens a small number of people badly, and — the practical objection — it *looks* like a stunt. The ring sees a performance. An everyday word is smaller, entirely private, and reads as strange rather than theatrical. She is the only person in the circle who knows how odd

it feels, which is exactly the asymmetry you want.

Choose a plain noun for an object you can point at. Cup. Lighter. Shoe. Not tent, not fire, not anything the group has been joking about for two days — loaded words come back too fast because they're already loud in the room.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Eyes can stay closed. I'm holding something — you had it in your hand three minutes ago. (Hold up the cup, whether her eyes are open or not. If they're open, let her look.)*
>
> *Here's what we're doing. In a moment I'll ask you what this is, and I'd like you to describe it to me without any hurry. What it's for. What it's made of. What it feels like in a hand.*
>
> *And while you do that — (quieter, on her out-breath) — the word for it can stay with me. You can leave it here. It'll be right here when you want it back.*
>
> *(Two seconds. Then, in your normal voice, unhurried:)*
>
> *All right. What is this?*
>
> *(Say nothing while she works. Nothing at all. Do not help. Do not fill the pause. Three seconds of a person hunting for the word 'cup' is worth more than any sentence you could add.)*
>
> *Interesting, isn't it. Whether it was right there the whole time, or you had to go and get it — either way you just felt the difference between a word*

you have and a word you're reaching for."

Then hand it back, out loud, no exceptions.

Say it exactly like this:

"Cup. That's the word, it's yours, it never went anywhere. Say it back to me once."

Wait until she says it. Then move on. A word you took stays taken until you give it back in plain language and hear it in her mouth — not because anything is stuck, but because leaving loose ends in someone's head is bad manners and it is how you end up with a nervous volunteer at two in the morning.

To the ring, one line, delivered while she is searching, quietly:

"Give her a second. Don't help her."

That line does three jobs. It stops the helpful friend from shouting "CUP", it tells the ring that the pause is the event rather than a malfunction, and it puts everyone on her side.

If it doesn't come She says "a cup" instantly and looks pleased.

Take the win you actually got:
"Good — that one's nailed down. Some words are bolted on tighter than others, and now we know yours is."

Then, if you want a second attempt tonight, use a different object with a longer word — lighter, bottle, jacket — and only after another routine has run in between. Back to back, it reads as a man rummaging for a result. Ten minutes later, it reads as the next thing on the list.

8.4 Heavy Eyelids

ROUTINE 8.4 — Heavy Eyelids

What it is The eyes stay closed, and finding the muscle that would open them turns out to be more work than expected.
How long 45 seconds
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite Immediately after an induction. This one is ratification,
not an opener — cold, it fails more than it lands.

Use this one directly on the back of a rapid induction from Chapter 7 while her eyes are already shut and her breathing has already changed. It is the cheapest convincer in the book in terms of effort and the most sensitive to timing. Ten seconds too late and you are asking a wide-awake person to keep her eyes closed as a favour.

Volume down. This whole card is quieter than the last three.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Eyes stay closed. Nothing to do there at all.*
>
> *There's a set of small muscles right across your eyelids, and they've been working all day — (true, and she can feel it the moment you name it) — and as they stop working, you don't have to keep them shut, and you don't have to open them. Either one is fine. Neither one is your job right now.*
>
> *Your eyelids can stay heavy and useless for a minute. That's all they want anyway.*
>
> *(Pause. Watch for the flicker under the lids. Then, still quiet:)*

In a moment I'll ask you to test them — not to open them, just to test them. And the more you test them, the more you'll notice how far away the doing of it feels. Like a light switch in another room.

Test them now. (Two seconds. Watch. Then move on before she can escalate.)

That's it. Whether they stayed completely shut, or they fluttered and stayed anyway — either way you just found out how much of you actually joins in when you decide something."

Two tests. Not three. On the first test most people find a strange, sluggish nothing. On the second test some people find the same. On the third test almost everyone finds their eyelids, because by then it has become a contest, and you do not want a contest — you want a woman who is mildly surprised at her own face.

Nothing here is ever phrased as *you cannot*. She can. She can open her eyes any second she chooses, and if she does, that is information, not defeat.

If it doesn't come Her eyes open — usually fast, usually with an apologetic little laugh.

Say it immediately, warm, no pause:

"That's the reflex — it's quick, everybody's is.
Close them again, and let this be the second time.
The second time is always easier than the first."

This is true, and it's the doorway into Chapter 9:
a second closing after an opening goes further
than the first one did. Take the second close,
don't re-test the eyelids, and go straight into a

deepener instead. You have converted a failed convincer into a working staircase, and nobody watching knows the difference — because there isn't one.

8.5 The Anchor Test

ROUTINE 8.5 — The Anchor Test

What it is You fire an anchor you set two minutes ago, in front of the group, and everyone watches something come back.
How long 30 seconds to set, 20 seconds to test
What you need A bench, a table, a cool box — anything with a hollow
sound.
Prerequisite A landed convincer or a deepener already in the bank.
You cannot test an anchor you haven't properly set.

The full treatment of anchors is Chapter 13. What you need here is the smallest possible version, used as a convincer, because an anchor firing in public is the one piece of evidence that convinces the ring more than it convinces the volunteer.

Use sound. Two knuckles on wood, twice, evenly spaced. On a campsite, a sound anchor beats a touch anchor for a plain reason — you can fire it from two metres away, without asking permission again, without leaning into anyone, and it survives a noisy field better than a spoken word does. (Word anchors and touch anchors have their own uses and their own chapter. Sound is the one that works across a fire.)

Setting it. Do this at the deepest, quietest point of whatever you were already doing — not as a separate

event. She does not need to be told that an anchor is being set, and telling her turns it into a test she can fail.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"(Two knocks on the bench, evenly spaced, while she's at her quietest.)*
>
> *That sound. That's just this — this exact bit, right here, where nothing's required of you.*
>
> *(Two knocks again, same rhythm, same spot, three seconds later.)*
>
> *And your body's good at filing sounds like that. It doesn't need your help to do it, and it doesn't need you to remember doing it."*

Then leave it alone for at least two minutes and do something else entirely. An anchor tested twenty seconds after it is set proves nothing to anybody, including you.

Testing it. Bring her back up, chat, let her look around, let the group say something. Then, without announcing what you are about to do:

To the ring first, in your ordinary voice:

> *"Watch her shoulders. Not her face — her shoulders."*

Then two knuckles on the bench, twice, same rhythm, same spot.

Then, to her, quietly, three seconds after the knock:

> *"What came back?"*

Not "you feel calm again". Not "there it is". An open question with a real range of answers. If she says "nothing", she is allowed to say nothing, and you will deal with that below. If she says "huh — my shoulders just dropped", the ring already saw it happen before she said it, and you have the only kind of proof that works on a crowd: something they noticed *before* it was announced.

(An anchor is not a switch bolted into her head. It is a two-minute-old habit made of one sound and one moment, it fades over hours and days like every other habit, and anybody who tells you otherwise is selling something.)

If it doesn't come You knock and nothing visible happens.

One: knock a second time, slower, and drop your
own voice by a third when you speak after it.
Half the time the anchor was fine and your
delivery was loud.

Two: hand it to her, honestly:
"Anything, or nothing?"
Take her answer as it comes. If it's nothing,
say so:

"Nothing yet. It's a fresh one — those take a
second setting. We'll set it again later and
it'll be there on Saturday."

That is true, it costs her nothing, it costs
you nothing, and it books a return visit. Do
not fire the anchor a third time in front of
the group. Three knocks with nothing after them
is the only version of this that actually
damages you.

8.6 How to Announce a Convincer Without Promising It

This is the section to read twice.

Almost everything that goes wrong with convincers goes wrong in the four seconds *before* them, in the sentence where the beginner tells everyone what is about to happen. He does it because it feels like showmanship. What he has actually done is write a testable proposition on the sky, hand the volunteer the role of examiner, and give twelve witnesses a scoreboard.

Run every announcement through three questions before it leaves your mouth.

One: could a bystander with a stopwatch say "that didn't happen"? If yes, rewrite it.

Two: does the sentence tell her what she will feel, or ask her to notice what she does feel? Telling is a claim. Noticing is an instruction, and instructions to notice are always carried out.

Three: does the sentence have a losing branch? If there is an outcome that counts as nothing, seal it before you speak.

Here is the same content, twice, wrong then right.

Wrong: "In a moment you won't be able to open your eyes." **Right:** "In a moment, notice how much work opening them turns out to be." *The first names a binary outcome and appoints a jury. The second cannot come out negative, because "not much work at all" is still an answer to a question about how much work it is.*

Wrong: "You will forget the number four." **Right:** "One of those numbers is going to be further away than the others. You'll know which one when you get to it." *"Will forget" is a prediction about an event with a timestamp. "Further away" is a comparison with no scale, no yardstick, and no way to score it from outside her head.*

Wrong: "Your arm is locked." **Right:** "Your arm can stay exactly where it is, and you don't have to do anything to keep it there." *Locked is a state. States can be disproved in one second by a woman who wants to see. The permissive version gives her nothing to disprove — the arm coming down was never excluded.*

Wrong: "You can't remember the word." **Right:** "Notice whether the word's right there, or whether you have to go and get it." *Both outcomes are covered and both are interesting. Note what this does to her: she is now running an experiment on herself, and the experiment has no failing result.*

Wrong: "When I knock, you'll feel exactly the same calm as before." **Right:** "When I knock — what comes back?" *Claiming an identity between two of her internal states is the single easiest thing in this book for a volunteer to reject, because she is the only person who can check and she checks instantly.*

Wrong: "You'll feel a tingling in your fingers." **Right:** "Somewhere in that hand there's a sensation that wasn't there a minute ago. Go and find it." *Naming the sensation is a testable claim about a specific nerve. "Somewhere, something" is not — and there is always something in a hand.*

Wrong: "You're going deep now." **Right:** "You don't have to be anywhere in particular for this to work." *Depth claims invite the worst question in the trade: "am I actually under?" The permissive version removes the question and the performance anxiety attached to it.*

Wrong: "Try to lift it — you can't." **Right:** "Test it, and notice how much of you actually joins in." *"You can't" is a dare, and half the campsite will take a dare. The second version makes her curious instead of competitive, and curiosity is the only state in which this reliably works.*

Wrong, to the ring: "Watch this — she can't move her arm." **Right, to the ring:** "Watch her shoulders." *Crowd-facing claims are the expensive ones. You can repair a private sentence with another private sentence. A promise made to twelve people has to be paid in front of twelve people.*

Wrong: "This always works." **Right:** "This works for most people most of the time. Let's find out which one you are." *The second is true, it is disarming, and — the part beginners miss — it makes both outcomes into a result. She now has a role in either branch instead of a verdict in one.*

Two more rules about the announcement, both about timing rather than grammar.

Announce late. Four seconds before the event, not thirty. Every extra second of anticipation is a second in which she builds an expectation with a shape, and specific expectations are what get compared against reality and found wanting. A vague forward lean is

worth more to you than a drumroll.

Announce the frame, not the outcome. "I'm going to ask her arm to do something" is a frame. "Her arm is going to stay up" is an outcome. The frame gets the ring's attention pointed the right way without writing a cheque.

And the grammar of the seal, one more time, because it is the piece people drop when they get nervous:

> *"Whether it [X] or it [Y] — either way you'll [notice / feel / find out] [something true about the difference]."*

Both branches lead somewhere. Neither branch is nothing. Learn the shape, not the example — if you say the same sealing sentence four times in one night, the fourth one sounds like a man reading from a card, and it is worse than nothing.

8.7 When the Convincer Fails and Everybody Is Watching

It will happen tonight. Not might. On any evening with more than six volunteers in it, at least one convincer produces a woman blinking at her own perfectly mobile arm, in front of her friends, while everybody waits to see what your face does.

The principle is simple and it has a hard edge on it: **the absence gets reframed, never conceded — and you do not lie to do it.** Those are not in tension. They only look like they are because most people can think of one way to reframe, which is to claim

something happened. That is the one route that is closed.

Here are the three that are open. Learn all three, because they fail in different weather.

Rescue One — The Relabel

Take something that *actually happened* and name it as the event.

This one requires you to have been looking. If you spent the last twenty seconds thinking about your next line instead of watching her, you do not get this rescue, and that is the honest cost of not paying attention.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"There — that. That's the drop. That's the bit that goes first."*

Or:

> *"Watch her hand. Not the arm — the fingers. They went before anything else did."*

Or:

> *"That pause. That's what we're after — everything else is decoration."*

The rule that keeps this honest: **name only what you saw.** Her fingers uncurled. Her breathing changed rate. She swallowed. Her head tilted four degrees. Her count slowed on the number before the gap. All of these are real, all of them are visible to the ring the moment you point at them, and all of them are genuinely the small end of the same phenomenon. What you are doing is redirecting attention to the true

small thing instead of the absent large thing. What you are not doing is inventing a small thing. If nothing happened, nothing happened, and you take Rescue Two.

Rescue Two — The Hand-Over

Give the verdict to the volunteer, with an honest question, and take what she gives you.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"What did you notice — if anything?"*

Three words at the end do all the work. *If anything* makes "nothing" an acceptable answer, which is the only reason she will tell you the truth, and the truth is usually better than nothing. What comes back is, more often than not, something you could not have seen: *my hand felt further away*, *I lost the count for a second and didn't care*, *everything went quiet*. The ring hears it from her, not from you, and it is worth four times what your description of the same thing would have been worth.

And when she says "honestly, nothing", you say:

> *"Good — that's a clean baseline. Some people need the second pass."*

Which is literally true. It is true that you now know her baseline. It is true that repetition changes the picture for a lot of people. You have conceded the fact and reframed the meaning, which is the whole art, and you have done it without a single false statement. Then move.

The failure mode of this rescue is pressing. If she says nothing and you ask again in different words, you are teaching her, and everyone watching, that there is a right answer and she got it wrong. One question. One answer. Onwards.

Rescue Three — The Forward Move

You do not rescue it. You spend it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That one's not landing tonight. Here's the one that does."*

Then go straight into your most reliable routine — the one with the highest hit rate you own, the one you could run half asleep. No pause. No explanation. No diagnosis.

This looks like the weakest of the three on paper and it is often the strongest in the field, for a reason that has nothing to do with hypnosis: a man who names a miss in four words and keeps moving reads as somebody who has seen a hundred of them. A man who explains why it didn't work reads as somebody it has never happened to before. The ring is not scoring individual attempts. They are watching to see whether you are rattled. Answer that question the right way and the miss costs you nothing.

Groups also remember the last thing, not the third-from-last thing. A miss followed by a hit is a hit. A miss followed by ninety seconds of you talking about the miss is the story of the evening.

What Not To Do, Ever

Do not blame her. "You're resisting." "You're overthinking it." "You're not letting go." All of these are attacks dressed as diagnoses, they are said in front of her friends, and they are the fastest way to make yourself the kind of person nobody sits down with twice. Whatever happened, it is your line, your timing or your reading of the room. Take it.

Do not blame the noise, the beer, the wind or the hour. Even when it's true. It sounds like the first thing, only cowardly.

Do not run the same wording twice. Repeating a failed script louder and slower is the single most common thing I see, and it converts a small miss into a visible struggle.

Do not explain the mechanism. Nobody around that fire wants a lecture about expectation and attention at half past one, and the explanation reads as an excuse no matter how good it is.

Do not go for a bigger one. The instinct after a miss is to escalate — arm didn't stay up, so let's do the whole body. Escalation after a miss is how a small dead patch becomes four minutes of nothing. Go smaller. Go to something with a physical readout that is nearly free: the fingers, the breath, a hand that's warmer than the other one.

When It Goes Wrong

The arm won't come down. You said "arm's yours again" and it is still up there. She is not stuck — nothing is stuck, there is no mechanism in a human being for a stuck arm — she is waiting for a clearer instruction than the one you gave. Take the wrist, lower it physically all the way to her thigh, and say it as a statement: *"Down. On your leg. Move the fingers."* Statement, not question. Never ask a person in this state whether they'd like to put their arm down; questions hand the problem back to somebody who is currently not in the mood to make decisions.

She's frightened by her own arm. It happens perhaps one time in forty, usually with someone who came in very keen. Drop every trace of trance voice on the spot and use your ordinary daytime one: *"Hey — look at me. That's just your arm, it does what you tell it. Put it on your knee. Good. Squeeze my hand. Right — you're back, you're on a bench, that's Jonas over there and he's holding a warm beer."* Ordinary voice, ordinary facts, ordinary objects, in that order. Then hand her something to hold and do not run another routine on her tonight, no matter how much she asks.

A bystander shouts "that's fake". Two workable answers. Give him a job — *"Come here. Hold her elbow. Tell everyone what you feel."* — which converts the loudest sceptic into your instrument, and which works more often than you'd expect because he now has to describe something in front of his friends. Or drop it entirely: *"Might be. Let's do one where you can't tell."* What does not work is arguing. Nobody has ever been argued into being convinced at a campsite at

one in the morning.

She's clearly playing along. You will know — the reactions arrive slightly too early and slightly too big. Do not expose her. She is doing it because she wants the evening to work and she thinks she's helping. Lower the stakes and switch to something with a readout she cannot fake in advance: the missing number, or a hand that has to be described rather than performed. Half the time the performance turns into the real thing about ninety seconds later, which is a genuinely odd feature of this work and one I have no tidy explanation for.

The word doesn't come back within four or five seconds. Give it to her. Out loud, plainly, no drama: *"Cup. The word is cup."* Do not stretch it for effect. Do not let her sit in it because it's making the group laugh. A convincer you cannot switch off in one sentence is a convincer you should not have run.

Your anchor fires by accident. Somebody drops a crate on the bench and your volunteer's shoulders drop in front of everyone. This is a gift and a warning at the same time. Take the gift — *"That wasn't me"* is the strongest sentence available to you and it happens to be true. Then take the warning: a sound anchor set on a communal bench at a festival will be fired by strangers all night. Set it on something you control, or something quieter, or move it.

Somebody starts filming. Ask her, not the camera, and ask before it goes any further: *"Are you all right with that being filmed?"* If she hesitates at all, treat the hesitation as a no and say so out loud so the person filming hears it. Then carry on. This takes eight

seconds and it is the difference between an evening people remember warmly and a thing she wishes she could take back.

She's further gone than you thought — on the beer, not the trance. The convincer is where this becomes obvious, because her responses arrive at wrong speeds and in wrong sizes and she cannot hold a simple instruction across two sentences. That is your stop sign, not a challenge. Wind it up, sit her down properly, and do not touch it again tonight. Somebody who cannot reliably hold a question and its answer cannot reliably agree to anything, and a convincer that lands on someone in that state proves nothing to anyone and looks bad from three metres away.

You get greedy. This is the one that catches everybody, me included, more than once a summer. Two convincers land beautifully, so you run a third, and a fourth, and the fourth one dies — and the fourth one is what the group takes to bed with them. Two convincers, then move on to a routine. Three at the absolute outside, and only if the first two were unmistakable. The point of this chapter was never to prove as much as possible. It was to make one thing undeniable and then get on with the evening.

And whatever happened or didn't, you still close it properly. Even when the convincer produced nothing and the whole thing feels like a non-event, she gets the full return: eyes open, name used, hands moved, something held, a minute of ordinary conversation before she stands up in the dark near a fire with tent lines everywhere. Chapter 14 covers this in full and it is not optional on the nights when nothing

worked. Those are the nights you are most likely to skip it, because it feels like there is nothing to come back from. Do it anyway.

Chapter 9 — Deepeners in a Loud Place

Half past one, second night, and the bass from the main stage is coming through the ground into the bench you are both sitting on. Her eyes have been closed for forty seconds. Somewhere behind you a group is losing an argument about a tent peg. Every book you have read told you to find a quiet room, dim the lights, and take ten minutes to bring her down.

You have none of that. You have four minutes, a fire that needs another log, and a noise floor you cannot switch off.

So stop treating the noise as the enemy. The noise is material. The bass is a metronome you did not have to buy. The heat on her face is a channel. The shouting behind you is one more thing her body already agrees is happening, which makes it the cheapest pacing truth on the field. Everything in the five cards below is built out of what is already there.

What deepening actually does. It does not add anything. It gives a state that has already started somewhere to go, and it gives her time to notice she is in it. Noticing is the working part. A person who has registered the change cooperates with it; a person who has not registered it keeps checking whether anything is happening, and checking is a waking activity.

Why it has to be shorter outside. Indoors, people run eight to twelve minutes of deepening. Out here you have between forty-five seconds and two and a half

minutes before something walks into your scene — a friend with a phone, a stranger asking for a lighter, a change of wind that puts smoke in her face. Long deepeners do not fail outdoors because they are wrong. They fail because they are interrupted, and an interrupted deepener costs you the whole approach. Build short. Repeat instead of extend.

How you read depth without asking. Asking "how deep are you?" hands her a test she can fail, and gives you an answer she guessed. Read it instead.

• **The breath.** Watch the shoulders, not the chest — in firelight the shoulder line is the only readable one. You want the out-breath to become longer than the in-breath. Roughly even at the start, roughly two-to-one after a working deepener.

• **The swallow.** One dry swallow, usually twenty to forty seconds in. It is small, it is easy to miss, and it is the most honest signal on this list.

• **The head.** It comes three to eight degrees off vertical and stays there. What tells you something is not the tilt. It is the correction that does not happen.

• **Response latency.** Say something tiny and see how long the answer takes. Half a second is a waking answer. Two to four seconds is a working one. This is the single most useful measure you have.

• **Facial tone.** The muscles around the mouth let go, the lips part two or three millimetres, the face flattens out and stops looking arranged. *(Eyelid flutter is not a depth gauge. It is common, it impresses bystanders, and it tells you nothing you could not get from the out-breath.)*

The scale you actually need. Three steps: **light**, **usable**, **deep**.

Light — she is letting her eyes stay closed, breathing has changed, latency under a second. Stop talking for twenty seconds and she opens them.

Usable — latency two to four seconds, one swallow seen, head off vertical, she stays closed through a twenty-second silence. Roughly eighty per cent of everything in this book runs here.

Deep — latency past five seconds, her voice comes out quieter and slower and lower than her normal one, she does not react when a stranger walks past her knees, and afterwards she is wrong about how long it took.

That is the whole instrument. Anyone selling you a graded ladder with numbered levels to use on a meadow at two in the morning is selling you something. *(There is no meter. There has never been a meter.)*

9.1 Fractionation

ROUTINE 9.1 — Fractionation

What it is You bring her almost all the way up and let her go back down, two or three times. Each return is faster and lands lower than the one before.
How long 90 seconds for two cycles. 2 minutes 20 for three.
What you need Nothing. Her eyes already closed.
Prerequisite A completed induction from Chapter 7. Her eyes are staying closed without you holding the moment together.

This is the strongest deepener in the book, and it is the one beginners skip, because bringing her up feels like undoing your own work. It is not. Here is the honest version of why the way back in goes further than the first way in.

The first descent was construction. She had never done it, she had no target, and a fair part of her attention was spent on the question nobody says out loud: *will I be able to come out of this again?* The second descent is not construction, it is retrieval. She has a place to go back to. She also has the answer to the question, and she got it by demonstration rather than by promise, which is the only way that question ever gets properly answered.

There is a third thing. Coming up gives her a contrast, and contrast is what makes an internal state noticeable at all. Ten seconds of a loud, cold, bright field, and then closing again — the closing itself arrives as relief. The noise does the work for you.

Which of those three is doing the lifting, nobody can prove. What is reproducible on a campsite is the timing: the second drop takes about a third of the time the first one took, and the third takes half of the second.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That's fine. Just like that.*
>
> *In a moment I'm going to ask your eyes to open — not all the way, just enough to see the ground in front of your boots. You don't have to do anything with what you see. (Pause. Let her get used to the idea before it happens.)*

And now — let them open.

(Two seconds. Not longer. Do not let her scan the camp. If her eyes come up towards your face, keep talking through it.)

Good. And close them again — and notice how much easier the closing was that time than the first time.

(Say 'close' on the beginning of her out-breath. If you miss it, wait for the next one. There is always a next one.)

And as they close, everything you found a minute ago is still there, waiting, and you can let yourself drop straight back into it — twice as far, in half the time, because this time you already know the way.

(Ten seconds of silence. Count them. Beginners count four and think they counted ten.)

And again. Let them open — just a little.

(Two seconds.)

And close. All the way down. (Voice drops on 'down'. Not louder. Lower.) And whether it goes deeper this time or simply gets easier to stay, either way you'll notice something has changed since you sat down."

Third cycle only if the second one bought you something — a longer out-breath, a slower reopening, a hand that stayed where it fell. If the second cycle looked exactly like the first, a third will look exactly like

the second. Take what you have and go to the routine.

If it doesn't come Her eyes open, she looks around, she comes fully up and says "sorry" or laughs. Do not send her back down. Do not say "let's try that again". Say: *"That's the one that did it — that's exactly what I wanted to see. Stay sitting for a second, that stuff takes a minute to wear off."* Then hand her back to the group with something to do. She has lost nothing, you have lost ninety seconds, and roughly one person in four does this on the first fractionation. That is not a failure, that is the arithmetic.

9.2 The Bass Line

ROUTINE 9.2 — The Bass Line

What it is The bass from the main stage becomes the metronome of
the descent — every beat she feels through the bench
is one more step down.
How long 2 minutes. Never more than one track.
What you need Audible bass. Three hundred metres out is ideal: you
want it felt more than heard.
Prerequisite 9.1, or any induction that has her eyes closed and her breathing settled.

Pure utilisation. You are not competing with the sound system, you are subcontracting to it. The beat is regular, it is loud enough that she cannot ignore it, and — this is the part that matters — she has already agreed it is happening. That makes every sentence you attach to it half true before you finish saying it.

Two practical conditions. First: only start this in the front half of a track. If you cannot tell where you are in the track, do not start it at all. Second: never build an anchor on a beat you do not control. Anchors go on things you own — your voice, your two fingers on her shoulder. That is Chapter 13, and the reason it is a rule is in the paragraph below.

Say it exactly like this:

"You can hear the main stage from here. You can feel more of it than you can hear.

(Wait for a beat you can feel through the bench, and speak on it, not between.)

And every one of those — you don't have to count them, you don't have to follow them — every one of those can be one step further down, the way stairs are, when you're not thinking about your feet.

That one. (On a beat.) And that one. (On a beat.)

And the more of them go through you, the less of them you need to notice — until at some point they're just something happening a long way away, to somebody else, while you go on ahead.

(Twenty seconds of silence here. Let the sound system carry it. This is the only deepener in the book where silence from you is a feature.)

And when the sound moves away — and it will, it always changes over — you don't have to come back for it. Some part of you already knows the way down doesn't need a soundtrack."

That last sentence is the whole routine, and it goes in *before* the music stops. Pre-seal the gap or the gap eats you.

When the music stops mid-routine. It will. Track gaps run four to twenty seconds, changeovers between acts run fifteen to thirty minutes, and I have run this maybe sixty times and lost the track in about a third of them. There are exactly two moves.

Move one, the short gap. Say nothing for two seconds, then transfer to something else that is already there.

> *"And now that it's gone somewhere else — you can find the one that's still here. (Pause. Three seconds.) Slower. Closer. And that one doesn't need a stage."*

Her pulse, her breathing, the generator behind the food stalls, the wind in the flysheet. Do not name which one. The blank is doing the work, and whichever she picks will be a better fit than the one you would have chosen for her.

Move two, the long gap or the changeover. Do not try to hold the deepener together. Fold and move on.

> *"And it's quieter out here now than it's been all night. You can let that be the last of it — nothing left to listen to, nothing left to do."*

Then go straight to your routine, or to 9.5 if you need another thirty seconds.

When it comes back — and it comes back at full volume. Pre-frame it in the same breath as the pre-seal above, or take the hit.

"And when it comes back, louder — you can let that be the floor coming up to meet you, and settle right into it."

If it doesn't come She starts nodding to the beat, or taps a foot, or hums. That is a waking body enjoying a good track, and it is not going to turn into depth by being ignored. Use it and get out: *"That's a good one, that. Have a listen to the rest of it — I'll get you when the fire's sorted."* No exit line about hypnosis, no explanation. Twenty minutes later she is a warmer prospect than she was, because nothing embarrassing happened to her.

9.3 The Descending Count

ROUTINE 9.3 — The Descending Count

What it is Five numbers down, each one dropped onto a breath she
is already taking.
How long 50 seconds.
What you need Your voice, and a position where you can be heard at
forty centimetres.
Prerequisite Eyes closed, breathing settled. Works straight off any induction from Chapter 7.

Counting is the oldest deepener there is, and it is the one that gets destroyed outdoors, because people run it the way they read it: ten down to one, slow, soft, with a long pause between numbers. Out here that gives the field twenty separate chances to interrupt you.

Three changes, and they are not optional.

Shorter span. Five to one. Three to one if the camp is loud enough that you are competing. Ten numbers outdoors is not deeper, it is longer, and longer is the only variable the field can attack.

Firmer voice, not louder. Louder is what beginners do and it wakes people up, because volume reads as urgency. Instead: same volume throughout, and let the pitch fall about a third across each number, so the word itself goes downhill. Then buy your audibility with geometry — forty centimetres, at forty-five degrees, speaking to the ear that faces away from the stage. Distance beats volume every single time.

The number lands on the out-breath. Not near it. On it. The exhale is a movement downwards that is already happening in her body; you are attaching your word to a truth in progress rather than asking for one. Miss a breath and wait for the next. The whole gap between numbers is one full breath cycle — four to five seconds — which also means you are silent for about seventy per cent of this routine.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"In a moment I'm going to count from five down to one. You don't have to do anything with the numbers. You don't have to follow them down. They'll do that on their own.*
>
> *(Wait for the start of an out-breath. Every number below goes there.)*
>
> *Five. Letting the shoulders go first, the way they always do.*

Four. And that's the sound of the camp getting further away, without you having to move.

Three. (Pitch lower here than on four. Same volume.) And you might notice the next breath is longer than the one before it — or you might not notice, and it happens anyway.

Two. Nothing to hold on to now. Nothing to keep track of.

One. (Quietly. On the very end of the out-breath.) And down. And you can stay right there, and it can go on getting easier, without you doing a single thing about it."

If the field spikes — a whistle, a shout, someone dropping a crate — do not stop and do not raise your voice over it. Take it in on the next number: *"Four — and that too."* Three words. It costs you nothing and it costs the interruption everything.

(No, she isn't asleep. Nobody in this book is ever asleep — right up until the one who genuinely is, and that is the last section of this chapter.)

The firmer, shorter, faster version of this — the one you run standing up in front of fourteen people — is a different register and it lives in Chapter 12. Do not import it here. In a two-person conversation on a bench, the show voice reads as somebody being handled.

If it doesn't come Three ways this fails and one answer to all of them.

She counts along out loud: she has turned it into a task. Say *"You can let me do the counting"* once, on the next

number. If she does it again, stop counting and go to 9.5.

She opens her eyes at three: finish the count anyway, down to one, in exactly the same voice, then say *"Good — that's about as far as that goes tonight, and that's plenty for what I want to show you."* Then run something light from Chapter 10.

You get to one and nothing has changed — same breathing, same face, same instant answers: do not count again from ten. Say: *"That's fine, some people go the other way with numbers."* Then 9.5, which does not use them.

9.4 The Fire Deepener

ROUTINE 9.4 — The Fire Deepener

What it is The warmth on her face becomes a dial for the descent — and she is the one turning it.
How long 2 to 3 minutes.
What you need A fire that has burned down to coals. A seat at a metre and a half. A sober person sitting between her and the ring.
Prerequisite 9.1 or 9.3 already passed. Late round only — after midnight, once the wind has dropped and nobody is still throwing pallets on.

This one works on a channel that the indoor books cannot use, because indoors there is nothing on the skin to work with. Out here there is: a real, uneven, moving warmth on one side of her face and on the backs of her hands. You are not suggesting warmth. It is there. What you hand her is a control for it — brighter, wider, softer, further — and that control is

imaginary while the sensation is real. That mixture is the whole trick, and it is why this deepener holds up when a shout goes up somewhere behind the toilets.

Safety before wording, because this is the one routine in the chapter that has a fire in it.

Seat her at a metre and a half from the ring, facing it, and put a sober friend on her fire side. Never at arm's reach of the flames. Never on a camping chair with a low back and a tipping point — a bench with both feet flat on the ground. Never ask her to move, lean, reach, or stand while she is down. And never — not at three in the morning, not in October, not as a clever contrast — run a cold suggestion outdoors at night. Cold is not a submodality out here. Cold is the weather.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"There's the fire on the left side of your face. You didn't have to be told that. It's been there the whole time.*
>
> *And the backs of your hands know about it too.*
>
> *(Pause. Four seconds. Let her locate both of them.)*
>
> *Now — somewhere on that side of your face there's one spot that's warmest. You don't have to look for it, and you don't have to be able to say where it is. Some part of you already knows exactly which one it is.*
>
> *(Pause. Six seconds. Do not fill this.)*
>
> *And that spot can spread. Not fast. About as fast as warmth actually moves — down the cheek, along the jaw, into the shoulder on that side. And*

as it goes, that whole side can get heavier than the other one, and you can let it.

(Watch the head. If it goes over towards the fire side by a few degrees, the routine is running. Say nothing about it.)

And here's the part you get to do. That warmth has a setting, the way a dial has, and you're the only one who can reach it. You can turn it up until it's got a weight to it, or you can leave it exactly where it is — and the more of it there is, the further down it takes you.

(Pause. Eight seconds.)

Whether it spreads all the way across, or just stays on that one spot and gets heavier — either way, you'll have felt where it went."

If the wind turns and puts smoke in her face, do not talk over it and do not pretend it is not happening. She will cough and come up two-thirds of the way if you leave it. Take it in:

"And that's the smoke turning — you can let that be the signal to let the rest of it go, and let your head come forward a little."

If the fire dies out from under you, the same move: *"And it's going down out there, and you can go down with it."* Then finish within thirty seconds, because your channel has just gone out.

If it doesn't come She shifts, rubs her face, says "it's a bit hot actually". Believe her — that is a body report, not resistance, and it outranks your routine. Move her

back half a metre yourself, out loud, with a hand on the back of the bench and not on her: *"Move with me — that's better."* Then run 9.5 from where she is now. Nothing has broken. A person who tells you she is uncomfortable and gets taken seriously is a better volunteer ten minutes later than one who was talked out of it.

9.5 The Weight Ladder

ROUTINE 9.5 — The Weight Ladder

What it is Heaviness, delivered one body part at a time, from the hands downwards — and she never has to move a millimetre.
How long 70 to 90 seconds.
What you need Nothing. She is sitting, her hands are somewhere they are supported.
Prerequisite Any of 9.1 to 9.4, or straight off an induction.
This is also your fallback when the other four have not landed.

The reason this one belongs in a festival book is the reason it looks boring on the page: it never asks for a movement. Every kinaesthetic test in Chapter 6 asks for something — a raised arm, a locked hand, a sway. Out here, in a jacket, on a wet bench, holding a cup, every request for a movement is one more thing she can be seen not doing. Weight asks for nothing. It is verified only inside her, which means it cannot be failed in front of her friends.

Two rules of order.

Only name parts that are already supported. Hands on thighs, forearms on knees, back against the

table edge, boots on the ground. Weight on an unsupported limb turns into a demand to hold it up, and holding it up is muscular work, and muscular work is being awake.

Skip the chest. Every part in the list below is safe to make heavy except that one. *(Heaviness across the chest is the one image that makes people check their own breathing, and a person checking her own breathing is a person who is awake — and occasionally a person who is now slightly frightened at one in the morning.)* Shoulders yes, downwards only. Jaw yes. Chest and throat, never.

Seven parts maximum outdoors. One part per out-breath. One sentence per part, and do not decorate them.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You're sitting on something solid, and your hands are already resting somewhere. That's the whole of what you have to do.*
>
> *(From here, one line per out-breath. Do not rush. Do not slow down either — the rhythm is the routine.)*
>
> *Start with the hands. Just the weight of them, where they are. Nothing to change.*
>
> *And the forearms — and you might notice the forearms are heavier than the hands were.*
>
> *The upper arms, hanging off the shoulders, all of it going the same direction.*

And the shoulders can come down — not pushed down, just down, the way they go when nobody's watching.

The jaw. And when the jaw lets go, the teeth come apart a little, and the whole face goes with it.

(Watch here. Lips parting two or three millimetres is your signal. If it happens, add four seconds of silence before the next line.)

The weight through your hips, into the bench, into the ground.

And the legs, and the feet, and the boots — heavy the way boots are at the end of the third day.

(Pause. Six seconds.)

And now it's all going the same way, and you don't have to hold any part of it up, and there's nothing underneath you that isn't already holding you. And the more of it lets go, the less of it needs you to be in charge of it."

The last line is where this routine earns its place. You are handing responsibility for her posture to the bench and to gravity, both of which are demonstrably doing the job already, and that is a delegation she cannot argue with.

If it doesn't come She shifts her hands, crosses her arms, sits up straighter mid-ladder. Do not go back and redo the part she moved. Take the new position as the new floor and carry on from there: *"And that's better — from there."* If she comes right up and opens her eyes, you have run out of runway for tonight. Say: *"You're*

one of the ones who does it with their eyes open — that's more useful than the other kind." Then run a Chapter 6 opener, which needs nothing from this chapter at all, and finish the evening on something that works.

How Much Depth Do You Actually Need

Less than you think. Almost always less than you think.

The standard beginner failure on a campsite is not going too shallow. It is stacking three deepeners onto someone who was already usable after the first one, burning four minutes on it, and arriving at the routine with a woman who is now so far inside her own head that she is not tracking your sentences any more. Nobody home. She is not resisting, she is not faking, she is having a genuinely nice quiet time and your instructions are arriving as weather.

That is the real cost of over-deepening, and it is worth saying plainly: **the most useful state is not the deepest one.** A fair number of people are at their most responsive in the middle band and get less responsive past it, not more. Depth is not a ladder where the top step wins. It is a window, and you can go out the far side of it.

The second cost is time. Your window on a meadow is six to nine minutes from the moment she says yes to the moment somebody wanders over. Every ninety seconds of deepening is ninety seconds not spent on the thing she will actually remember and tell people

about. Nobody has ever gone back to their tent and said, *the deepening was superb*.

And be honest with yourself about why you are reaching for a fourth deepener. Usually it is not the routine that needs it. It is you, wanting one more minute before you have to commit to something that might not work.

Here is the actual allocation, by name, for what is coming.

Light is enough for everything where her own body does the work and she only has to stop interfering. The sway and the locked hands from Chapter 6 — those are tests, not routines, and they run before any deepener at all. In Chapter 10: **the heavy lighter**, **the warm hand**, and **the hand that finds its own way to her face**. In Chapter 11, around the fire: **the passed yawn** and **the sticky-hands relay**, both of which get most of their lift from the group rather than from the state. In Chapter 12: the whole opening of the set, including **the wave** — a wave down a row of fourteen people works on rhythm and on the person next to them, and a deep row makes a worse wave, not a better one.

Usable is where this book lives. Everything that has to hold up against a small challenge sits here. In Chapter 10: **the bench that holds on**, **the water that tastes like something else**, **the name that slips**, and the whole of the number-block family that Chapter 8 uses as a convincer. In Chapter 11: **the circle count**, and any routine where one person's response has to survive her friends laughing at her. In Chapter 13, every anchor you set: an anchor laid in a

light state fades before Saturday whatever you tell yourself, and one laid at usable depth has a chance of surviving a night's sleep and a hangover. If you get to usable and stop, you can run four fifths of this book.

Deep is required for exactly three things, and you should know them so you can stop chasing depth for anything else. Amnesia that holds when she is actively trying to break it — not the forgotten number, which is a light-to-usable effect, but a name she cannot retrieve while fourteen people shout it at her, in **the hot seat** in Chapter 12. A taste or smell change that survives her arguing with it. And anything where she is asked to see or not see something that is physically in front of her, which is the top end of Chapter 12 and which I have had land properly on a campsite maybe eight times.

Which means: on a field, at night, with a tired crowd, you will reach deep with roughly one volunteer in ten, and only when the rest of the evening has already gone well. Build your evening so it does not depend on that person showing up. If she does show up, you will know inside forty seconds — the latency goes past five, the voice drops, and she stops reacting to people walking past her knees. Then, and only then, take the ceiling off.

When It Goes Wrong

She actually falls asleep.

Third day, she has slept maybe eleven hours since Thursday, she is warm for the first time since the afternoon, and you have just given her ninety seconds

of somebody speaking gently and asking nothing of her. Of course she went to sleep. It happens to me two or three times a season and it will happen to you.

Tell the difference first. In depth, the response is slow but it is there: say her name and something moves — an eyebrow, a finger, the breathing rhythm breaks for one cycle. Asleep, there is nothing at all, the jaw goes properly slack, the head drops hard rather than settling, and the breath goes slow, deep and even in a way that a deepened breath does not. If you are unsure, you are probably looking at sleep, because depth answers.

What you do not do. Do not shake her. Do not shout. Do not clap next to her ear, and above all do not let a friend do it — that is the move somebody always reaches for, and it puts a sleeping person's heart rate through the roof for no gain. Do not let anyone film it. Do not let her sit there with the group watching, which is how a nothing-event turns into a story about her.

First, the group. Turn to them before you turn to her, in your ordinary voice, at ordinary volume, no rhythm at all:

> *"She's asleep. That's all this is — she's been up since Thursday. Phones down, and give her thirty seconds."*

Then the person nearest her, by name if you have it: *"Sit next to her, hand on her shoulder, don't let her go sideways."*

Then her. Everything below is said in your normal talking voice. Drop the trance voice completely — the cadence you used for the deepener is the last thing you

want in her ear now.

"Anna. (Normal volume. Wait two seconds.)

Anna — I'm going to put a hand on your shoulder. (Do it as you say it. Shoulder only. Firm, flat hand, and give her a shake of about a centimetre — the amount you would use on a friend who has nodded off on a train.)

Take a breath in for me. A proper one.

That's it. Eyes open when you're ready — there's no rush, but I want them open before you say anything.

(Wait. Most people take four to eight seconds. Do not fill it.)

Good. You're on a bench, it's about half one, you're at the fire, I'm Felix, that's Jonas next to you. You fell asleep.

Feet flat on the ground for me. Both of them. And stay sitting.

(Now the full-wake buffer, and it is not optional. Two minutes, sitting, before she stands up. Fire, guy-lines, tent pegs, dark, mud. Nobody stands up on my count.)

Drink some of that. (Water. Not beer. Chapter 3 applies to the end of the evening as much as the start.)

Wiggle your fingers, roll your shoulders once, and tell me what you can hear from the main stage. (A question with a factual answer. It puts her

attention outside her own head, which is the actual work of waking somebody up. Do not ask her how she feels — that sends her back inside.)"

End on an instruction, not a question. *"Stay there another minute, I'll get you a jacket."* Then get her the jacket. That instruction is the last thing in the sequence and it needs to be something you actually do.

Afterwards, tell her the truth. She will ask, and somebody in the group will have already told her she was "gone", because that is a better story. Kill it, kindly, in one sentence:

"You fell asleep. That's all that happened — it's not a hypnosis thing, it's a third-day thing."

Do not sell it as profound depth. You will be tempted, because it looks impressive and everyone watching thinks they saw something remarkable. Take the smaller true version. The person who gets an honest account from you at one in the morning is the person who comes back tomorrow with two friends.

Prevention, since this is entirely predictable. After one o'clock, on the third day, with someone who has been awake since Thursday, do not stack deepeners at all — run the openers from Chapter 6 and the short numbers from Chapter 10, both of which need her participating rather than settling. Keep her upright, not reclined. Never run this lot on someone lying in a hammock or slumped against a car. And if she yawns three times during your approach, you already have your answer: not tonight, not this routine. Say goodnight and find somebody who ate dinner.

Chapter 10 — The Numbers: One on One

She is sitting at the end of the bench with her right hand flat on the table, and you have about four seconds to decide what you are going to do with that hand. This is the whole job. Everything in the last five chapters — the approach, the openers, the induction that works standing up, the deepeners that survive a bass line two hundred metres away — exists so that you can arrive at this exact moment with one person, one hand, and one idea.

A number has four beats. Learn them as four, not as a script.

Hook. The reason the thing is happening at all. Usually a sentence and a look. The hook is not "I am going to hypnotise you now." The hook is "put your hand flat for a second." People will do almost anything small if it takes one second and costs nothing.

Install. The frame you hand over. This is where the language from Chapter 2 does its work: you say the true part first, you bridge, you give permission, you address the body part instead of the person, you put the doubt on the noticing instead of on the event, you leave a hole she can fill, and you seal it so that no outcome counts as a failure. Sixty to ninety seconds. Longer is not deeper. Longer is nervous.

Test. The moment she finds out. You do not announce the test as a test. You invite it, and you invite it in a way that makes any result usable.

Release. You take it back. Explicitly, in words, before you do anything else.

That last one is not a formality, so I will say it once at full volume and then never repeat it: **every number gets taken back before the next one starts.** Not at the end of the evening. Not "it wears off anyway." Before the next number. Two reasons, both practical. First, safety: nobody walking to the toilets over guy ropes in the dark needs a leftover heavy leg, and nobody should carry a laugh trigger into a conversation with a stranger. Second, craft: an unreleased number contaminates the next one. If her hand is still half-glued and you start the temperature number, you are running two installs in one nervous system and you will get mush.

The other rule: **one number, one target.** Never install two things at the same time. Not "your hand is heavy and your name is going away." Not "the arm rises while the phone gets heavy." One idea, one body part, one outcome, one release. A stack of six clean small numbers beats one ambitious double every night of the week.

The hit rates here are my own counts from my own nights — not research, just a tally kept badly over a few hundred attempts on wet grass. Yours will run worse for the first twenty tries.

10.1 The Glued Hand

The workhorse. It pulls from the block-and-release family: you are not adding anything to her hand, you are describing a missing piece — the part that starts the lift — and letting her attention go looking for it and not find it. Every other number here is a variation on this move. If you only ever learn one, learn this one properly.

ROUTINE 10.1 — The Glued Hand

What it is Her hand rests on the table and the lifting doesn't arrive.
How long 70 seconds install, 20 seconds test.
What you need A flat surface. A bench, a table, a cooler lid.
Prerequisite One passed opener from Chapter 6 — ROUTINE 6.1 (The Hand Magnet) or ROUTINE 6.2 (The Finger Vise). No induction needed.

Sit at forty-five degrees to her, not opposite. Opposite is an interview. Beside is a conspiracy.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Put your hand flat. Like that. (Touch the back of her own hand with two fingers of yours for half a second, then take your hand away. Announce it while you do it: "Just the back of your hand.") Good. Now you can feel the table under your palm — the temperature of it, the little bit of grit, the pressure where the heel of your hand takes the weight. You don't have to do anything with that. Just let it be there. And as you notice the pressure, your hand can settle a little more, and the more it settles the less there is to hold up. That's your hand doing that, not you. You can let it. And somewhere in the settling, the part that would*

normally start a lift — that first little decision — that can just go quiet. It doesn't have to go anywhere. It can just not be where you'd reach for it. Some part of you already knows what I mean. And in a second I'm going to ask you to try, and I want you to actually try, because whether it comes up slow and strange or stays exactly where it is, either way you'll notice something.

(Two seconds. Not one. Let her hand sit in it.)

Now. Try to lift it.

Watch the tendon on the back of her hand, not her face. If the tendon flickers and the hand doesn't come, you have it. If the whole arm tenses at the shoulder, you have it and she is fighting, which is better — that is the fight that makes the story she tells later.

Let her try for three seconds, then stop it. Never let a struggle run past five. Past five it turns into a competition and she has to win.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

Alright — and now the table gives it back. (Tap the table once with one knuckle.) Hand's yours again, all the way to the fingertips. Lift it, make a fist, shake it out. There. Normal hand, boring hand.

(No, nothing was glued. Nothing was ever glued. She was holding it there, and the holding didn't show up to her as hers.)

If it doesn't come She lifts it easily. Do not react to that as a loss and do not say "let's try again". Say:
"Good — you're the kind that keeps hold of the controls. That's the harder one to work with

and the more interesting one." Then go straight to a lighter opener from Chapter 6 and build back up. Her lifting the hand costs her nothing and costs you nothing unless you flinch.

10.2 The Name That's Gone

The classic, and the one most often ruined by the person running it. It pulls from the same block family as 10.1, but the thing that goes missing is not a movement — it is the reach. The name never leaves. What goes quiet is the automatic grab that normally fetches it.

Here is how you do not make it humiliating, and you will follow this exactly. You do it **without an audience the first three times you ever run it**. You never say "you don't know your name" — that is a claim about her mind and it is both untrue and insulting. You say the reach is quiet, which is what actually happens. You give her the name back within forty seconds whether or not it landed. And if she gets even slightly distressed — not surprised, distressed — you stop and hand it back immediately, no frame, no cleverness.

ROUTINE 10.2 — The Name That's Gone

What it is She goes to say her first name and the reach for it isn't there for a moment.
How long 90 seconds install, 30 seconds test, hand it back immediately after.
What you need Nothing. Her eyes can be open or closed.
Prerequisite A short induction — ROUTINE 7.2 (The Shoulder Drop) or ROUTINE 7.1 (The Interrupted Greeting) —

plus one round of ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation).

Say it exactly like this:

> *Eyes closed is easier for this one, but it works either way. (If her eyes stay open, drop your own voice half a step and slow down. Do not tell her to close them twice.) Right now there's a lot going on in your head — the music, the cold on the back of your neck, whatever you were about to say to me. All of that is still there. And as it keeps going on without you, there's one small thing that can get quiet, and it's not a memory, it's a movement. When somebody asks your name, you don't look it up. It just arrives. That arriving is a little muscle, and little muscles can go loose. This one can go loose now. Not gone — nothing's gone, everything's exactly where you left it — just the arriving can take the night off. And you might notice you can still see the shape of it, or the first letter, or nothing at all, and any of those is the same thing happening. In a moment I'm going to ask, and you don't have to produce anything. Whether it comes straight out, or arrives late, or just sits there being amusing, either way you'll know something happened.*
>
> *(Three seconds. Not two.)*
>
> *So — what's your first name?*

If she stalls, laughs, or says "that's weird", you have it. Give it exactly two beats of that and no more. Nobody needs eight seconds of standing in front of a hole.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

And here it is, coming back the normal way — you'll hear me say it and it clicks straight in. (Say her name once, clearly, in a completely ordinary voice.) There. All yours, back to normal, and it never went anywhere.

(No, she did not forget her name. The name sat there the whole time. What went missing for eleven seconds was the reflex that fetches it.)

If it doesn't come She says her name instantly. Take the win sideways: "That came out fast — say it three more times, fast as you can." Then run the count from 10.3 instead, which is easier because a number sequence is a rehearsed track and easier to interrupt than an identity. Never say "it didn't work".

10.3 The Number That Vanished

Same family, softer target. Counting out loud is a rail she has ridden since she was four, and rails are easier to lift a sleeper out of than fields. Chapter 8 used a number block as a convincer — that one was about proving something to her. This one is a number: it has a hook, an audience-facing shape, and a release.

ROUTINE 10.3 — The Number That Vanished

What it is She counts from one to ten out loud and one of the numbers isn't there.
How long 60 seconds install, 25 seconds test.
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite Any induction from Chapter 7 — 7.1 to 7.5 — plus one round of ROUTINE 9.3 (The Descending Count).
Passing 10.1 is a good sign but not required.

Pick the number **seven**. Not six, not eight. Seven has the most syllables in the run and the most texture, and it is the easiest one for her to notice the absence of afterwards, which is the part she will tell people about.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Count with me. One, two, three. (Count along with her the first time, out loud, at her speed.) Easy. You've done that ten thousand times and you've never once had to think about it. Good — that's the point. Because a thing you never think about is a thing that can slip without you noticing the slipping. And as you sit here with the count still running somewhere in the back, one of those numbers can just step out of the line. Not be deleted — nothing gets deleted, you'll have it back in a minute and you'll wonder what the fuss was — just step out and stand to one side while the others carry on past. Some part of you has already picked which one. (Pause. One second. Then, quieter, as if it were an afterthought.) Seven can take the break. And when you count out loud in a moment, you might hear the gap, or you might hear a little stumble, or you might only notice afterwards. Any of those and you'll have felt it.*
>
> *Out loud now. Start at one, go up to ten, normal speed.*

Do not mouth along. Do not nod on the numbers. Let her run.

Seated, and with the circle quiet. Counting out loud is a small public performance and people speed up when

they feel watched, and a fast count rides straight over the gap. If somebody is talking behind you, wait for the lull rather than raising your voice — a raised voice tells her to concentrate, and concentration is the one thing that keeps every number in this chapter from landing.

Most often you get one of three things: a clean skip, a stumble and a correction, or her counting ten numbers and arriving at eleven. All three are the number working. If she arrives at eleven, say nothing until she notices — she will — and then let her be the one who says it.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

> *And seven comes back and gets in line. Count me from five to nine. (Let her.) There it is. Full set, in order, boring again.*

If it doesn't come She counts one to ten clean. Answer with the count itself: "Now do it backwards from ten, fast." The backwards count is harder and stumbles on its own, and a stumble is enough to keep the evening moving. Then step down to 10.1 and rebuild. A missed number costs nothing as long as you don't explain it.

10.4 The Heavy Phone

Everyone has one, everyone holds it the same way, and everyone already has a body-memory of it being annoying to hold up. That is three quarters of the work done before you speak. The mechanism is a weight submodality: you are not adding mass, you are turning up the dial on a sensation that is genuinely there.

ROUTINE 10.4 — The Heavy Phone

What it is Her own phone gets too heavy to lift off her palm.
How long 60 seconds install, 20 seconds test.
What you need Her phone. Never yours, never anyone else's.
Prerequisite One passed opener from Chapter 6, ideally ROUTINE 6.3 (The Heavy Arm). Induction optional — this one runs cold.

Two hard rules before the words. **You never take the phone out of her hand.** It stays in her possession the entire time; if she wants to stop, she closes her fingers and it is over. And you never set the number up so that the phone ends up on the ground. Grass, beer, boots, dark. Her palm, flat, waist height, nowhere else.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Hold it flat on your palm. Face up, fingers open, like a little tray. (Show her with your own hand. Do not arrange her hand for her.) Now the honest bit: that thing weighs about two hundred grams and you've been carrying it since Thursday, so your arm already knows the exact weight of it without checking. Good. Keep it there and let your arm keep knowing. And as your arm keeps knowing, it can also start noticing the weight instead of ignoring it, and noticing something is heavier than ignoring it. The wrist can get the message first — wrists usually do — and then the forearm. You don't have to make it heavy, it isn't a trick you're performing, it's just what happens when weight stops being background. And the more the palm reports up the arm, the more there is to report. In a moment I'll ask you to lift it, and you can try properly — whether it comes up like*

it's been in the fridge, or the whole arm just says not right now, either way you'll notice which one.

(Two seconds.)

Lift it up to your face.

Watch the wrist. The tell is a wrist that starts and quits.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

Give it back its normal weight — two hundred grams, nothing, the same phone that was in your pocket all day. Lift it, check the time on it. (Let her actually look at the screen. Looking at the screen is what finishes the release, because the screen is the most ordinary object in her life.) Yeah. Normal phone.

If it doesn't come She lifts it straight up. Do not ask her to feel harder. Say: "Right — you've got a strong arm and a light phone. Put it in your pocket, we'll do one that doesn't need props." Then run 10.7, which uses no object at all and almost always gives you something.

10.5 The Invisible Guy Rope

The first number in the catalogue that a circle of people can watch and immediately understand. It pulls from the imaginal-space family: instead of subtracting something, you install an object that is not there and let her body negotiate with it. Bodies are very willing to negotiate.

Standing work, so read this first. Clear ground, three metres of it, checked by you with your own feet before

you start. No fire within four steps. No actual guy ropes within four steps — the joke of tripping over a real one while stepping over an imaginary one is not a joke at two in the morning. One friend standing at her elbow, told out loud what their job is: "If she wobbles, you catch her."

ROUTINE 10.5 — The Invisible Guy Rope

What it is She has to step over a tent line that isn't there, and her leg goes up.
How long 70 seconds install, 30 seconds to walk it.
What you need Three metres of flat, checked ground. A spotter.
Prerequisite Induction plus two deepener rounds — ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation) twice, or 9.1 then ROUTINE 9.3 (The Descending Count). Eyes open throughout. Do not run this on someone who hasn't passed at least one earlier number tonight.

Say it exactly like this:

Stand here, feet together, look at the ground about two metres out. (Point with your whole hand, not a finger. Stand at her shoulder, not in her path.) Nothing to do yet. You know this ground — you walked in over it, you've been stepping round pegs and lines all weekend, and by now your legs do that without asking you. That's true, and it's the useful part. Because your legs already have a lot of tent line in them. And as you look at that patch there, your legs can go on doing what they've been doing all weekend, which is finding lines. There's one across there, about shin height, the yellow-and-black kind, pulled tight. You don't have to see it to walk over it — plenty of people just feel where it is and lift. Some part of you knows exactly how high shin height is. So in a

moment, walk to me at a normal pace, and whether you step over it big and obvious, or just break stride a bit as you pass it, either way your legs will have decided something before you do.

(Step back four paces. Stand still. Do not gesture at the rope again.)

Come to me. Normal walking speed.

Do not stand where the rope is. If you stand there, you have told her body it is not there.

Watch the trailing leg. A big theatrical step-over is a lovely thing for the circle to see, but the trailing leg is where you find out if it went in: the trailing leg lifts too, or catches, or she glances down after she has passed.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

Stop there and look back at that ground. It's flat. Nothing across it, nothing to step over, all the way from there to here. Walk it back to me the normal way. (Let her walk the same line. This matters more than the words — the release has to be done with her feet, because that is where the number lived.) Flat ground. Good.

If it doesn't come She walks straight through. Say, before she can think about it: "Good, you're a plough — some people go over, some people go through." Give it a beat of laughter and move on to a seated number. Never ask her to walk it again. A second run of the same walk turns her into an actor, and once she is acting you have lost the evening's honest material.

10.6 The Taste Switch

Five-senses work. Taste is a strange one because it is mostly smell and mostly expectation anyway, which means you are not fighting the mouth, you are just relabelling what the mouth was already guessing.

Water only, or a sealed non-alcoholic drink she brought herself. Never alcohol as a prop, and this is not a moral position, it is workmanship. Four reasons, all of them practical. Alcohol has a strong taste of its own, so the shift you are trying to install has to fight a signal that is already loud, and you lose the delta you were going to show her. It muddies the credit — she cannot tell afterwards whether the strangeness came from your words or the third beer, so the number proves nothing to her and nothing to the circle. It quietly encourages her to drink faster in a game she thinks she is playing with you, which is exactly the failure mode Chapter 3 exists to prevent. And a hypnotist handing someone a drink reads badly to every person watching, no matter how it was meant. Water. Her own bottle, her own hands.

ROUTINE 10.6 — The Taste Switch

What it is A mouthful of water tastes of something else.
How long 75 seconds install, 15 seconds for the sip.
What you need Her own water. Unopened or already hers. Never a cup you touched.
Prerequisite Induction plus one round of ROUTINE 9.3 (The Descending Count). She needs quiet attention more than depth for this one.

Pick lemon. Not chocolate, not beer, not something sweet. Lemon has a physical component — the jaw, the sides of the tongue, the small wince — and physical

components give her something to notice even when the taste itself stays vague.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Take a small mouthful, don't swallow it yet, just hold it. (Wait. Let her hold it. Say nothing for two seconds.) Alright — swallow. Now, that was water, and water is basically nothing, which is why nobody can describe it. Your mouth spends most of its time guessing. It smells something, it remembers something, and it decides. That's not a flaw, that's just how tasting works. So — take the next one slower, and hold it at the front of the tongue, and let your mouth do its guessing out loud. And as it guesses, the sides of the tongue can get involved, the way they do with something sharp, and the jaw might have an opinion just behind the back teeth. You might get the whole thing at once, or just the edge of it, or just the wince without the flavour, and any of those is your mouth doing the work. Something citrus. That family. Take it now.*
>
> *(Say nothing while she holds it. Watch the jaw hinge, not the mouth.)*

Do not ask "what does it taste like?" — that is a quiz and she will answer to please you. Ask nothing. Wait. She will report it or she will not, and either way her face will have told you first.

Warm water beats cold. Cold is a strong sensation of its own and it flattens everything underneath it, which is why the bottle that has been sitting by the fire gives you a better run than the one out of the cooler. If all

she has is cold, have her hold the mouthful three seconds longer before swallowing, which is enough to get the temperature out of the way.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

> *And the next mouthful is just water again — flat, cold, nothing in it. Take one. (Let her.) Yeah. Boring water.*

(No, the water did not change. It was water the whole way through. The label on it changed, and the mouth follows the label more often than it follows the liquid.)

If it doesn't come She says it tastes like water. Agree first: "It does. It is." Then hand her something real: "Hold the next one longer — most people only get the wince, not the flavour." If the second one is also flat, drop it entirely and run 10.7, which uses the same sensory family but on skin, where the signal is easier to find.

10.7 The Temperature Trick

If somebody asks you to prove that any of this is real, run this one. It works on a comparison instead of an absolute, and comparisons are what a nervous system is actually good at. She does not have to feel hot or cold. She only has to notice that one hand is not the other, and hands are never the same anyway — the one that held the drink is genuinely colder, and you can start from that truth and go up from there.

ROUTINE 10.7 — The Temperature Trick

What it is One hand goes warm, the other goes cool, and she

can feel the gap between them.
How long 80 seconds install, 20 seconds test.
What you need Nothing. Both hands free.
Prerequisite Induction plus one round of ROUTINE 9.5 (The Weight Ladder). Runs fine with eyes open if the fire is close.

Say it exactly like this:

Both hands on your knees, palms down. (Sit at her side, both of you facing the fire if there is one.) Now — without moving them, tell me which one's already colder. (Wait for the answer. Whatever she says, take it.) Right. Left one. That's the one that had the bottle. So we start from something true and go from there. Left hand: it's already got the head start, and it can carry on the way it's going. Colder is easy for it because it's already doing it. Fingertips first — fingertips go before palms, they always do. And the more the fingertips do their thing, the further up it can travel, at whatever pace it wants. Right hand's got the opposite job and less to do, because the right one's been under your thigh and it's got the fire on it. So it can just keep getting the message it's already getting. Warm across the back of it, maybe heavier with it — warm usually comes with heavy. You don't have to run either of them. They can run themselves in different directions, which is a slightly stupid thing for a body to do and it does it anyway. In a moment I'll have you put them together, and whether the gap between them is big or small, you'll feel where the line is.

(Four seconds. This one needs the four. Not three.)

Now put your palms flat together.

Palms together is the test, because the difference has to declare itself at the seam. Watch for the flinch — most of the ones that land come with a small pull-back at the first contact.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

> *Rub them together, both of them, ten seconds' worth. (Let her rub.) And now they're the same again — same hands, same temperature, same as they were before we started. Two normal hands.*

(This is not control. You are not steering her. You handed her a frame and she furnished it with her own hands, and the furnishing is the whole trick.)

If it doesn't come No gap at the palms. Ask her one question and then stop: "Which one would you say is closer?" If she names one, that's your result and you seal it: "That's it — that's the difference." If she says neither, say "fair enough, your hands are honest" and move on without a second attempt.

10.8 The Laugh Trigger

Anchor work, on the word channel. This is the first number in the chapter that leaves something behind, and therefore the first one with a removal that matters, so read the removal before you read the install.

How you take it off. You do not leave a laugh trigger in someone. Not overnight, not as a gift, not "so we can do it again tomorrow." You remove it in front of her, out loud, before you do anything else, and you test the

removal by using the word once in an ordinary sentence and watching her not react. If she does react on the test, remove it again and test again. Anchors fade on their own — Chapter 13 goes into how fast and how honestly — but "it fades anyway" is not a removal, it is an excuse.

Choose **paprika**. Nonsense, harmless, and vanishingly unlikely to arrive by accident in a conversation about tent pegs. Never a person's name. Never a place. Never anything she might hear over the PA.

ROUTINE 10.8 — The Laugh Trigger

What it is One agreed word gets funny for as long as you leave it in, which is about four minutes.
How long 70 seconds install, then however many times you use it, then 30 seconds to take it out.
What you need Nothing.
Prerequisite Induction plus two rounds of ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation). Shallow doesn't hold an anchor.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Think of something that got you properly this weekend. Not a joke — the accidental kind, where somebody fell over a cooler. Don't tell me what it is. (Wait. Watch for the corner of the mouth. When it moves, keep going.) There it is, you've got it. And it's already doing a bit of the thing in your chest and around your eyes, which is what a laugh is before it's a sound. Stay with it a second and let it build its own way. (Two seconds.) Good. Now while that's running — paprika. (Say the word flatly, on the peak, not as a punchline.) Paprika. And it can hook itself onto that, the way a smell hooks onto a summer. You don't have to*

arrange that, hooking is what your head does for a living. And for a little while, the word can carry a bit of the chest thing with it. Might be the whole laugh, might just be the corner of your mouth going before you've decided. Either one and it's hooked.

(Talk about something else for fifteen seconds. Ask her where she parked. Then, mid-sentence, drop it in flat.) — so is that up past the paprika field or the other way?

Fire it three times, maximum. Four is bullying. Three is a number.

Removal. Say it exactly like this:

Alright, taking that off now. Paprika goes back to being a spice. (Say it slowly and plainly.) It's a red powder, it's on a shelf, it's boring, and the hook is off it. Say it back to me. (Let her say it.) Good. (Now test it — put it in a flat sentence about ten seconds later: "My sister puts paprika on everything." Watch. No reaction means done. A reaction means run the removal once more, then test once more.)

If it doesn't come Nothing hooks. Don't fire it a fourth time hoping. Say: "That one needs you further down than we've got — my fault, not yours." Then run the removal anyway. You always run the removal, including when there is apparently nothing to remove. That is not superstition, that is the habit that stops you forgetting on the night it did land.

10.9 The Rising Arm

Ideomotor work, which means: movement that arrives without the sensation of deciding. Nothing is lifting her arm. Her arm is lifting her arm, in very small increments, and the increments are below the size at which she notices authorship. That is all this is, and it is still the strangest thing in the chapter to be on the receiving end of.

ROUTINE 10.9 — The Rising Arm

What it is Her arm comes up off her thigh by itself, in small jerks.
How long Up to three minutes. This one cannot be rushed.
What you need Nothing. Seated, arm resting on the thigh.
Prerequisite ROUTINE 6.3 (The Heavy Arm) passed, plus one round of ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation). The arm has to be off her agenda before it can go anywhere on its own.

Slow is the entire technique. If you find yourself speeding up because nothing is happening, you have already lost it. Slow down instead. The lift usually starts between forty and ninety seconds in and it starts small — two millimetres at the wrist, or one finger.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Right arm resting on your leg, palm down, and leave it there. (Sit at her side. Do not look at her face for the rest of this. Look at the arm, because that is where she will look.) You can keep your eyes open or let them close, doesn't matter. What matters is that arm has nothing to do. It's just lying there being an arm. And an arm with nothing to do gets very honest — you start to feel the pulse in it, the weight of the sleeve, the warm*

patch where it meets your leg. Notice the sleeve. And as you notice the sleeve, there's a bit of that arm that isn't really under management. It never was. It does things while you're carrying a bag or getting up off a bench and you never signed anything. That bit can start now. Little movements first, the size of a twitch, in a finger or the wrist or somewhere in between. You don't have to help it. Helping is the one thing that stops it. And the more it goes on without you, the more room it's got. (If you see anything at all — a finger, the smallest lift — name it immediately and quietly.) There. That's it. That's exactly it, and it can carry on doing that, at its own speed, in its own direction, and you can watch it the way you'd watch someone else's arm.

(Say nothing for ten seconds. This silence is doing more work than the last four sentences.)

If the arm comes up more than about twenty centimetres, stop feeding it. Long floating arms get tiring and a tired arm ends the number badly.

Watch the shape of the rise, not the height. What you want is small and jerky, with pauses in it — five millimetres, stop, three more, stop. That stutter is the giveaway that the arm is running without a driver. A smooth, even, continuous lift is usually a helpful person doing you a favour, and it is worth nothing to her afterwards. If you get the smooth version, say "let it stop wherever it wants" and watch whether it stops. Something running by itself will park somewhere odd. Something being driven parks where she thinks it should.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

> *And now you take the arm back. All of it. Put it down on your leg yourself, deliberately, like you mean it. (Wait until she has actually put it down herself. You do not put it down for her — that is the difference between giving it back and taking it away.) Good. Yours, all of it, every finger.*

If it doesn't come The arm sits there. Say: "Some arms are heavy instead — check how heavy that one is now." You have converted a failed rising arm into a heavy arm, which is the same install pointed the other way, and it usually collects something. Then release the heaviness properly and go elsewhere.

10.10 The Stuck Shoe

The glued hand moved down to the floor, which sounds trivial and is not. A foot carries her whole weight, the number has to survive her being upright, and the failure mode is a person losing balance in the dark. Bigger effect, bigger care.

Same ground rules as 10.5, plus one: **one foot only, never both.** A person with one stuck foot leans and stays up. A person with two stuck feet has nowhere to put her weight, and that is how somebody sits down hard on a tent peg.

ROUTINE 10.10 — The Stuck Shoe

What it is One shoe stays down when she goes to walk.
How long 60 seconds install, 20 seconds test.
How long she Never more than five seconds of trying.
stays in it

What you need Flat checked ground, standing, a spotter at her elbow.
Prerequisite Induction plus two deepener rounds — ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation) twice, or 9.1 then ROUTINE 9.3 (The Descending Count). 10.1 passed tonight. This is 10.1 with a longer fall.

Say it exactly like this:

Stand normal, weight on both feet. (Stand beside her, at her shoulder. Tell the spotter, out loud, so she hears it too: "Stand there, hand ready, she won't need it.") Don't look down. Let the left foot read what it's standing on. You don't have to do anything with it. It's had all weekend to learn this ground: the flattened grass, the churned mud, the ridge of a root somewhere under the arch, the bit under the heel that isn't level with the toes. All of that is real, and your foot drew that map without asking you. And the more of that ground comes up through the sole, the more of it there is to sit in. A foot that's found that much doesn't get told to leave. Nothing's stuck — there's just no reason yet, and the reason is the part that can go quiet. Some part of you already knows which piece of ground it's holding. Right foot's free — right foot's out of this entirely. In a second I'll ask you to walk two steps towards the fire, and I want you to properly go for it, because whether the left one comes up late and dragging or the ground keeps the edges of it, either way you'll notice which foot you are standing on.

(Two seconds.)

Two steps. Go.

Watch the hip. A hip that swings and a foot that stays is the number. Count to four in your head. At four, you end it, whatever is happening.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

> *Floor lets go — both feet, all yours. Walk to the fire and back for me. (Watch her walk. Both feet, normal gait, no favouring. Do not move on until you have seen a normal walk. This is not ceremony; it is the check that tells you it is safe for her to be upright in the dark.)*

If it doesn't come She walks off normally. Do not chase her. Say it to the circle, not to her: "That's a walker. Some people you can't nail down." Then sit everyone back down and run a seated number. Standing numbers that miss should always be followed by a seated one — it puts the group's attention back on the bench, where you have better odds.

10.11 The Forgotten Number Four

The hard version of 10.3, and worth the extra depth because of what it does to the room. In 10.3 a number goes missing from a count. Here the count still gets to ten — she does not stumble, she does not stop, the run sounds completely normal — and four simply is not in it. She usually does not notice until somebody else says something, which is why this one is much better with two or three people around than alone.

ROUTINE 10.11 — The Forgotten Number Four

What it is She counts one to ten out loud, it sounds normal to her, and four never arrives.

How long 2 minutes install, 30 seconds test.
What you need Nothing. Two or three witnesses make it better.
Prerequisite Induction plus three rounds of ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation), or ROUTINE 9.4 (The Fire Deepener) run properly to the end. 10.3 passed earlier tonight. Do not attempt this cold — it is the first number here that genuinely needs the depth.

The difference from 10.3 is where you put the missing piece. In 10.3 you take a number out of the line. Here you take out the number's turn — the slot it occupies — so that the sequence closes up behind it and still feels complete. That is why it needs more depth: you are asking for a smoother lie than a stumble.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Everything's slower than it was ten minutes ago and you don't have to do anything about that. (Speak at half your normal pace for this entire install. If you speed up, this one will not land.) Counting's a track. You get on at one and it carries you to ten and you don't drive it. And a track can have a section closed without the journey feeling short — you've been on a train that went a different way round and you only found out later. So the count can close a section. Four's slot can be shut, and the ones either side just join up, and the joining up is smooth, which is the whole point of a track. Three, and then straight on. Nothing missing, nothing to notice, because a track doesn't tell you what it skipped. And a part of you is already doing the joining. (Pause. Three seconds.) When you count out loud in a moment, it'll sound completely normal to you. That's the bit*

worth paying attention to afterwards. Go ahead — one to ten, out loud, normal speed.

Say nothing while she counts. The people around you will react and that is fine and useful. Do not shush them and do not let anyone grab her arm.

If she gets to ten having said nine numbers and looks entirely satisfied, let two or three seconds of the circle's reaction happen before you say anything. That gap is the number.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

And four comes back and takes its slot, everything reopens. Count me from one to ten again, slowly. (Let her run the whole thing. All ten. Do not stop her in the middle.) All there. Full set. And you'll have the memory of it being odd for a minute, which is just how it goes — nothing wrong with the counting and nothing wrong with you.

If it doesn't come She counts clean, or she stumbles at four and corrects it. Take the stumble: "Did you hear that? That's the slot trying to close." If it was completely clean, do not run it a second time tonight — a second attempt on the same target after a clean run almost never lands and it teaches her to expect the trick. Go back to 10.7 and finish on something that collects.

10.12 The Friend Who Isn't There

The most demanding number in the catalogue, and the one I miss most often. Somebody in the circle stops being visible to her for about twenty seconds. It pulls from the dissociation family: you are not removing a person, you are moving one person out of the group her attention is sorting for.

Now the honest part, and you will say a version of it out loud to the circle before you start, because a number that fails in silence is worse than one that fails with a warning. **This lands for me maybe three times in ten, on a good night, on people who have already passed four or five numbers.** It is not a closer. It is not the thing you promise. It is the thing you try when everything else has already worked and you have thirty seconds of credit to spend.

Consent and setup, all of it required. Pick the friend, and get the friend's agreement quietly beforehand — a nod is enough, out of her line of sight. The friend's job: **stay still, stay quiet, do not touch her, do not wave, do not test it.** Half the failures of this number are a mate who cannot resist waving a hand in front of her face. Say that to him in those words. Nobody else moves either. No phones held up in front of her — you can ask for that once, and if the circle will not do it, do not run the number.

ROUTINE 10.12 — The Friend Who Isn't There

What it is One named person in the circle drops out of what she's sorting for, for about twenty seconds.
How long 2 minutes install, 20 seconds live, 30 seconds to put him back.

What you need A circle of at least four. A briefed, still, silent volunteer. Reasonable light on faces.
Prerequisite Induction plus three rounds of ROUTINE 9.1 (Fractionation), and at least three numbers passed tonight, one of them 10.11 or 10.5. Never the first thing you do with somebody, and never with someone she has any kind of tension with.

Choose a friendly, easy person. Never her partner. Never someone she has been arguing with. Never the loudest man in the circle. The best choice is somebody comfortable being briefly ignored, because that is exactly what this is going to feel like from his side.

Say it exactly like this:

> *Eyes closed for a minute. (She should be sitting. Everyone else stays exactly where they are.) You've been sorting faces all weekend without knowing you're doing it — thirty thousand people out there and you found your lot every time. That sorting runs by itself and it runs on a list. And a list can be short by one. Not deleted, not gone anywhere, everything exactly where it is — just one name off the list your eyes are checking against. Marc's off the list. (Say the name once, plainly, and never again until the release.) And when your eyes open, the fire's there, the bench is there, everybody's there, and the sorting just does what sorting does. You might find the bench looks like it's got a gap in it, or you might find your eyes go past a spot without stopping, or you might find it doesn't do much at all — those are three different amounts of the same thing. Nothing to look for. Just open them and look at the circle and tell me who's here.*

(Let her open her eyes. Then say nothing for the full twenty seconds. Nothing. The urge to help is what kills this one.)

Twenty seconds is the ceiling. Then you put him back, whatever happened.

Release. Say it exactly like this:

And the list goes back to full. Marc's on it. Look at him. (Point. Wait until she has actually looked at his face — not near it, at it.) There he is, been there the whole time, never went anywhere. Say hello to him. (Let them exchange a word. That word is the release.)

If it doesn't come She sees him immediately, which is the normal outcome. You already told the circle it usually goes that way, so all you need is: "There he is — that's the seven, not the three." Then close the set with something reliable: run 10.1 once more, get the clean hit, release it, and finish there.

Never end a session on a miss. Not because it hurts your reputation — because she'll go to bed with the last thing, and the last thing should be a thing that worked.

When It Goes Wrong

She fakes it, badly. You will know: the reaction is too fast, too big, and aimed at the circle instead of at herself. Do not expose her. Ever. She is doing it because she wants the evening to be good, which is a generous impulse badly aimed. Fix it by making the next number one that cannot be faked usefully — 10.7, where the report is private and there is nothing to perform. Faking usually stops on its own once she notices there is no audience payout in it.

Her friend narrates. There is one at every fire. He explains what is happening, predicts the next bit, tells her what she is feeling. He will destroy every number you run. Give him a job instead of a rebuke: "You're on spotter. Stand there, hand ready." A man with a task is a quiet man. If he keeps going, move her three metres so his voice is behind you rather than between you.

Somebody demands a test. "Make her forget her PIN." "Make him give me his wristband." No, and you do not negotiate about it. Say it flat and move: "Doesn't work like that, and I don't do numbers with somebody's stuff in them." Then run something small on the person who asked, if he is sober and willing. He is usually asking because he wants a turn.

Her phone rings mid-install. Stop. Let her answer it. Do not talk over it, do not tell her to ignore it, do not try to fold the ringing into the induction. When she is done, you start the number again from the top — not from where you were. An interrupted install is not a paused install, it is a cold one wearing the same clothes.

She opens her eyes in the middle. Nothing has gone wrong. Say "eyes open is fine" without changing your pace and carry on. The only thing that turns an eye-opening into a problem is your reaction to it.

It half-lands. The hand is heavy but comes up. The count stumbles but completes. This is the most common outcome of any number in the catalogue and you should treat it as the normal one. Seal it and bank it: "That's the bit — feel that? That's the whole thing, just quieter." A half-landed number that you frame as a result is worth more than a clean one you fumble the ending of.

She laughs and cannot stop. Common, harmless, and contagious around a fire. Do not fight it and do not shush her. Wait it out with your own face relaxed, then use it: "Alright, that's a lot of laugh — put it down on the bench and take a breath in through your nose." A laugh like that is excess energy looking for an exit, and giving it an instruction gives it one.

The release doesn't seem to take. She says her hand still feels a bit odd. This is nearly always residual attention, not residual suggestion, and the fix is physical, not verbal: have her do something with the body part that is unmistakably ordinary. Carry the crate. Open the bottle. Text somebody. The ordinary use of a limb is the strongest release there is, and it beats another sixty seconds of you talking about it.

She gets upset. Rare, and it happens. Stop the number where it stands. Do not analyse it, do not ask what came up, do not go looking. Take it all the way out, plainly, then sit next to her and be an ordinary person having an ordinary conversation about the

ordinary weekend until she is bored of you. If something real is going on in her life, she needs her friends and possibly somebody with an actual qualification, and you are neither of those things tonight.

Somebody is recording. Ask her, not the crowd, and ask her before the next number rather than after: "Someone's filming — you fine with that?" If she hesitates at all, that counts as no, and you say so out loud so that she does not have to: "She's not up for it, phones down." A number that ends up online without her clear yes is the one mistake in this catalogue you cannot take back with a release.

You lose track of what you left in. Four numbers deep, three conversations sideways, and you genuinely cannot remember whether you released the heavy phone. This happens, and it happens fastest on the nights that are going well. Two habits fix it. Keep the count on your fingers — one number in, one number out, thumb down between them — so the tally lives on your hand instead of in your memory. And when you are unsure, do not interrogate her about it. Run a plain sweep, once, in an ordinary voice: "Both hands normal, both feet normal, phone's a phone, words are words, everything back where it belongs." It costs eight seconds, it costs her nothing, and it does no harm on a night when there was nothing left in at all.

Somebody drunk wants a turn. He always does, and he always says he is fine. Use the test from Chapter 3 — can he ask you a clear question and still have the answer thirty seconds later — and when the answer is no, do not lecture him about it in front of his mates.

Give him a role instead: he holds the torch, he counts down, he is the spotter for somebody sober. Tomorrow afternoon, if he is around and upright, he gets his turn.

Chapter 11 — The Numbers: Small Circle

Six people on two beer benches, a fire that has burnt down to the useful stage — glow, no flame, no smoke in anyone's eyes. Half past one. One of them has been telling you for twenty minutes that he can't be hypnotized. Two of them have gone quiet and are watching your hands. One is asleep against a cooler and is out of this chapter entirely.

That is the standard situation on a campsite, and it is the best one you will get. Three to eight people who half know each other, sitting in a rough curve, nothing to do until the sun comes up. You will run more circles this weekend than one-on-ones, and the circle is more generous than the single — but it does not follow the same rules, and if you carry the one-on-one method into it you will spend the night being interrupted.

That same circle runs through every card in this chapter — Marek, Anna, Jonas, Lena and the two who never say anything — because a card reads differently when you can see what the same six people did twenty minutes earlier; the cards themselves are independent, and each one runs at any fire, in whatever order the prerequisites allow.

The group amplifies. This is the whole reason to prefer it. When Anna's hands stay laced together and she is laughing about it, the man next to her stops running the private argument about whether this is real. He has just seen it happen to someone he has known since Thursday. Nobody had to convince him of

anything. That is the single biggest advantage you get on a campsite, and it costs you nothing: every response you get lowers the resistance of everyone still sitting there. *(No, a group is not more suggestible than one person. It is easier to lead, and those are two different things.)*

The group disrupts. Same mechanism, opposite sign. One snort of laughter in the wrong second and five people come out at once. One person saying "this is stupid" at normal volume and the circle re-forms around him. In a one-on-one you have one attention to manage. In a circle you have six, they are wired together, and any of them can pull the plug.

So your job in a circle is not really hypnosis. It is traffic. You steer attention toward whoever is currently working and away from whoever is currently ruining it, and you do it without ever letting the group notice that you are steering.

The seating. Build the shape before you say a single suggestion.

Everyone in a half-circle. Two benches at about twenty degrees inward, not in a straight line, so that everyone can see everyone else's face. That matters — the amplification only works if they can watch each other. A straight bench facing a fire is the worst seating on any campsite and it is also the default, so you will have to move furniture. Move it. Do it while you are still talking about something else.

You stand at the open end. One and a half to two metres from the nearest knee — close enough to touch a wrist by taking one step, far enough that nobody has

to tilt their head back.

The fire goes behind your shoulder or off to your side. Three metres, roughly forty degrees off your axis, never directly behind your head. Never, under any circumstance, between you and them.

Three reasons, in order of how badly they will cost you. First: a fire between you and the circle splits the group in two and gives every pair of eyes a competitor. Fire is the most interesting object at any campsite. You will not win that. Second: the heat pushes people backwards off the bench and out of the curve, and the shape you just built collapses. Third: smoke turns. It will find someone's face at exactly the wrong moment, and a coughing fit in the fourth minute of a routine is a total loss.

Off-axis instead of dead behind you, because dead behind you makes you a silhouette and puts the light in their eyes. Off to the side lights their faces, which is what you actually need. They do not need to read your expression. You need to read six of theirs. Your voice does the rest.

The register changes here

From this point on you are not in the one-on-one register anymore. Chapters 5 to 10 were permissive: sitting beside someone, inviting, nothing forced. In a circle that voice disappears. Under fire noise and six people breathing, a soft invitation reads as uncertainty, and uncertainty in a circle gets filled by whoever talks next.

So: shorter. Firmer. Rhythmic. Commands to body parts, not requests to people. This is legitimate here for a reason that has nothing to do with authority — in a circle everyone knows it is a game, everyone can see everyone, and the group itself is the thing keeping you honest. A firm voice in front of witnesses is safer than a soft voice in private.

The difference, on the same instruction:

One-on-one: *"You can let your hands rest just like that, and if the fingers want to stay together a moment longer, there's nothing you have to do about it."*

Circle: *"Hands together. Fingers laced. Squeeze. Tighter. Now notice."*

Same mechanics underneath — the truth first, the bridge, the delegation, the gap they fill themselves, the sealing line at the end. Only the delivery is stripped. Do not mix them in one breath. A permissive murmur in a circle loses the group; a stage voice in a private conversation makes you somebody nobody wants to sit next to.

One thing does not change. Before anybody plays, the same gate as always, out loud, in front of the others: nobody who can't hold a clear thought long enough to answer a question and remember the answer thirty seconds later. Ask it as a normal question — "what did you have to drink tonight" — and listen to whether the answer arrives in one piece. If it doesn't, that person is company, not a volunteer. Not out of primness. Drunk people respond unpredictably, forget it by morning, can't consent to anything cleanly, and the rest of the

circle reads the whole scene differently when it is obvious to everyone but you.

11.1 The Group Hand Lock

**ROUTINE 11.1 — The Group Hand Lock

What it is — Everyone in the circle laces their fingers at the same time and squeezes; some of them find the hands stay together longer than they intended.

How long — 90 seconds, including the sorting you do afterwards.

What you need — Nothing. Their own hands.

Prerequisite — None. This is the group opener and it goes first almost every time.

You run this first not because it is impressive — it isn't — but because it sorts. Ninety seconds after you start, you know who your two responders are, who is available, and who is going to be a problem. That information is worth more than any single routine you could run on them.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Both your hands up where all of them can see. Do not explain what is about to happen. Start.)*
>
> *"Everybody. Hands out in front of you. Like this — fingers laced, palms flat together.*
>
> *(Show it. Don't describe it. Wait until every pair of hands in the curve is up. If one person doesn't join, leave them. Do not look at them.)*

"Arms straight. Elbows locked. Look at your hands.

"You can feel the pressure where the fingers cross. The bench under you. The heat on one side of your face.

"Squeeze. Harder. And as you squeeze, let the fingers press until the knuckles go pale.

"Tighter. Ten fingers, one block.

"Now notice how much of that the hands are doing on their own. And the more you squeeze, the more they hold themselves — there's nothing left for you to do.

"Some part of you has already stopped letting go.

"Try to pull them apart. And notice how the harder you pull, the tighter they hold.

(Two seconds. Not four. Watch the whole curve, never one face.)

"Stop. Look at the person next to you.

"And whether yours came apart slowly or stayed locked until I said stop — either way you just watched your hands do something without asking you first.

"Relax. Shake them out. Hands down."

Now sort, silently, while they are laughing at each other. Three tiers.

Tier one: hands stayed locked until you said stop, and the face went slightly surprised. In a circle of six you

get one of these, sometimes two. That is your engine for the rest of the night. Everything spectacular later runs through this person.

Tier two: hands came apart, but slowly, and with a visible hesitation first. Two or three per six. These are your circle. They will go with almost everything below as long as tier one goes first.

Tier three: hands came apart instantly, or never went up. One or two per six. Chapter section below. Do not write them off and do not look at them again for the next ten minutes.

Those numbers are the honest arithmetic on a good night with a sober circle. On a bad night you get six of tier three, and that is not a technique failure, that is Tuesday.

If it doesn't come — Nobody's hands stick at all. Do not repeat it and do not say "let's try that again". Take the laugh yourself: "Right — that's a circle of people with very obedient hands. Rare. Usually I get at least one." Then go straight into 11.2, which needs no response at all to work, and come back to a lock later in the evening when expectation has been built by something else. The failure costs them nothing because you never told them what was supposed to happen.

11.2 The Passed Yawn

**ROUTINE 11.2 — The Passed Yawn

What it is — A yawn goes around the circle one person at a time, and by the fourth person it is no longer under anybody's control.

How long — 60 to 90 seconds.

What you need — Nothing. Works best after midnight.

Prerequisite — None. Runs before or after 11.1, and is the right opener for a circle that is too sharp, too loud, or too sober to sit still.

This is the softest thing in the chapter and the most reliable. It also barely looks like a routine, which is exactly why it belongs here: the circle relaxes without having agreed to anything, and you get to watch who follows. *(Contagious yawning is not hypnosis. It is a reflex older than every technique in this book. You are borrowing it, not causing it.)*

Yawn first. Genuinely. If you have to fake it, look at the sky, drop your jaw, and hold the in-breath for four seconds — it usually turns real by itself.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Yawn. Then name it, quietly, as if you were only making conversation.)*
>
> *"Sorry. — That's the fire. Watch this, it's the best trick nobody believes.*
>
> *"Everybody, one thing. Look at me for a second, and let your jaw go loose. Not open. Loose.*
>
> *"Feel where your tongue is sitting. Feel the air going in slightly cooler than it goes out.*
>
> *"And as your jaw stays loose, you can notice how it starts to want something — and you don't have to give it anything yet.*

(Yawn again. Do not cover your mouth. Two seconds of silence afterwards.)

"Yeah. There it is.

"Anna — pass it on. Just look at Jonas and let it happen.

(Let the circle do the work. Say nothing for eight to ten seconds. This is the only routine in the chapter where silence is the technique.)

"And whether you're yawning now or just about to — either way something in the group already agreed with something in you.

"Nice. Now you're all tired. That's my fault."

If it doesn't come — One yawn, no chain. Take it as a joke and pocket the information: this circle is either too keyed up or too new to each other. "Tough crowd. Iron jaws." Then go physical instead — 11.1 if you haven't run it yet, 11.4 if you have, both of them give the hands something to do — and come back to the yawn in an hour when the caffeine has gone.

11.3 The Circle Count

**ROUTINE 11.3 — The Circle Count

What it is — The circle counts around, and when it comes to one particular person the number he needs is not there.

How long — 2 to 3 minutes.

What you need — Nothing. A circle that can count. A tier-one responder from 11.1.

Prerequisite — 11.1 run, and one clear tier-one response identified.

The rhythm of the circle does most of the work here. Six voices going round in a steady beat build a pattern in about four seconds, and a missing beat is far more obvious to everyone — including the person it is missing from — than a private failure would be.

Pick your best responder from 11.1. Sit him where the count reaches him fourth or fifth, never first. Then set the whole thing up in front of everyone, because the setup is what makes it land.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"We're going to count round. One each, starting with you. All the way to twelve, quick, no gaps.*
>
> *(Run it once clean. Let them get the rhythm. Then stop them.)*
>
> *"Good. Again — faster. Same order.*
>
> *(Run it a second time. Now speak to your responder while the circle is still counting, in the same beat as the numbers.)*
>
> *"Marek. Look at me. Stay with the count.*
>
> *"You can hear them going round and you know exactly where your number is. It's coming to you in three. In two.*
>
> *"And as it comes — one of them goes.*

"Not all of them. One. The one that's yours.

"You'll notice which one it is by the fact that it isn't there. The space is there. The number's gone somewhere else.

"Some part of you has already put it down.

(Let the count reach him. Do not help him. Do not fill the silence. Three seconds of nothing is the whole routine.)

"And whether it's completely gone or just slippery — either way you heard the gap.

(To the circle, immediately, before anyone can comment.)

"Keep going. Skip him. Round again.

(Second pass. Faster. If it holds a second time, stop there — do not go for a third.)

"Stop. Marek — here it is. Take it back. Seven. Say it."

He says it. He gets it back in the same second, in front of witnesses. Never leave a block sitting on somebody because it makes a better story.

If it doesn't come — He says the number normally. Nothing missing, no hesitation. Do not comment on it and do not slow down. Stay in the beat and hand it straight back to the circle: "— and round, keep going, all the way to twelve." The count carries on, the moment passes in under two seconds, and there is nothing for anyone to have noticed. Then go to 11.4, where the whole circle works at once and no single

person can fail visibly.

11.4 The Bench That Holds On

**ROUTINE 11.4 — The Bench That Holds On

What it is — Everyone leaves one palm still on the bench until the wood goes warm under it, and the warm patch turns out to have an edge that moves.

How long — 2 minutes, ten seconds of which are silence.

What you need — A beer bench, a table, a cooler lid — any flat surface all of them can reach. Wood is better than plastic. Cold wood is better than warm wood.

Prerequisite — 11.1, ideally with at least one tier-one or two tier-two responses. Nothing in this one is squeezed, pressed or held — after 11.1 the circle expects effort, and this is the card that takes it away.

The routine runs on physics you do not have to invent. Wood is a poor conductor: a palm left still on a plank for twenty seconds warms the plank, and the plank hands it back. So the warmth is real, it is the size of a hand, and it has an edge. You are not making anybody feel warm — you hand them back a warmth they made themselves and then ask about its shape. Where it stops. Whether the edge is sharp. Whether it is still where it was. Every one of those has a true answer, which is why it runs on six people at once.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Everybody at the table — one hand. Flat. Palm down on the wood.*

(Put yours down first. Fingers together, not spread. Then stop talking.)

"Don't press. Don't move it. Leave it there.

"Cold first. It's colder than you are — that's all that's happening so far.

"Now wait.

(Ten seconds. Say nothing. This is the only silence in the card and it is doing the work.)

"It isn't cold under the middle of your palm anymore. That's your own heat coming back off the wood.

"And as it comes back, find the edge of it. Where the warm stops and the bench starts again.

"Sharp edge or soft edge. Don't decide — find it.

"Check it again. It's further out than it was.

"Your hand isn't doing that. The bench has got it now, and wood keeps things.

"Same underneath you. Where you're sitting, backs of your legs, your back if it's against wood — warm there too. You did all of that and never noticed.

"Some part of you already knows how far it's going to go.

(Two seconds. Watch the row of hands, not faces. The ones that land go very still, and a finger or two lifts half a millimetre off the wood.)

"Hand off. Two inches to the left. Flat, on cold wood.

"Other hand back on the warm one. Two hands, one bench, two temperatures.

"And whether the gap is obvious or you have to go looking for it — either way the bench is holding something for you that you put there yourself.

"Off the wood. Both hands in your lap, palms up. Give it to the air."

Do the palms-up line every time. It is a physical full stop and it means nobody is left sitting there with a hand they are still thinking about.

If it doesn't come — Somebody says "it's only warm because my hand was on it." He is right, and you say so at normal volume: "That's exactly what it is. Now find the edge." The mechanism was never the claim. Six blank faces and no edge found by anybody means the wood was already warm — go to 11.5, which needs no bodies. Nothing was promised either way, because you asked them to find something instead of telling them what they would feel.

11.5 The Name Nobody Can Say

**ROUTINE 11.5 — The Name Nobody Can Say

What it is — One name goes missing from the whole circle at the same time, and they sit there looking at each other trying to find it.

How long — 3 minutes.

What you need — Nothing. A name.

Prerequisite — 11.1 plus at least one other routine landed. This one is the first thing in the chapter that gets loud, so it needs a circle that is already warm.

Choose the name before you start, and choose it carefully. The easy version is a name nobody at that fire owns: the band on the poster, the town you are all camped outside of, the festival itself. The stronger version is someone sitting in the circle — much funnier, and much more likely to go wrong if you take it without asking.

So ask, out loud, in front of everyone: "Jonas — can I use your name for this? It goes away for about a minute and then you get it back. You can say no, that's a real option." If the answer takes longer than two seconds, use the band instead. Nobody enjoys being the person who was erased in front of their friends, and the ones who mind least are exactly the ones who say yes fastest.

Say it exactly like this:

"Everybody. Look at me, not at each other.

"There's a name at this fire that all of you know. You've all said it tonight, some of you twenty times.

"Say it now. All together. Ready — say it.

(Let them say it. Loud. That is the last time it exists.)

"Good. Now let it go.

"You can feel the last bit of it still sitting somewhere behind your teeth. And as you breathe

out, it goes off the edge — it's still in there somewhere, it's just not where you keep it.

"The place it lived is empty now. You can feel the shape of the gap.

"Some part of each of you has already filed it somewhere you don't have the key to.

"Now. Look at him. And tell me what he's called.

(Do not laugh. Do not smile. Keep your face flat for four seconds — this is the only time in the chapter where your expression matters more than your words. If you smile, the circle exhales and it's over.)

"Anybody. First one to get it, say it.

(Let them flail. Ten seconds, no more. Somebody will say the first letter, somebody will say a wrong name, somebody will get it and shout — all three outcomes are good.)

"And whether it's completely gone or just out of reach — either way, six people just went looking for something they've known for years.

(Give it straight back, all together, no delay.)

"Take it back. On three, all of you, out loud. One — two — three."

If it doesn't come — Somebody says the name immediately, cleanly, no hesitation. You have about one second before it collapses. Take it and rebuild it as a joke at your own expense: "Well done. You're the strongest mind at this fire and you'll be insufferable

about it." Then keep the circle moving. The person whose name it was got their name back either way, which is the only part that mattered.

11.6 The Chain

**ROUTINE 11.6 — The Chain

What it is — The circle holds hands and something travels along the line, one person at a time, in the order they are sitting.

How long — 4 to 6 minutes, and never longer.

What you need — Everyone seated. Nobody standing. Feet flat on the ground.

Prerequisite — 11.1 with a clear tier one, and at least two other routines landed. Do not open with this. It is the biggest thing you will run at a fire and it needs a circle that has already seen three smaller things work.

This is the one people describe afterwards. It is also the one with the most moving parts, so build it in this exact order.

Seating first. Tier one goes at one end of the arc, where you start. Tier two next to him, in descending order. Tier three — if they are playing at all — goes at the far end, where the chain arrives last and the momentum of four other people is already running. Nobody in tier three ever goes first. Rearranging six people looks like nothing if you do it as furniture: "Marek, swap with Anna, you're too far from me."

Then the touch. You are going to put a hand on the first person's shoulder. Announce it and give them a way

out, in front of everyone: "Marek, I'm going to put my hand on your shoulder for about ten seconds. Yes or no?" Shoulder, wrist or hand. Nothing else, ever, no matter how the evening is going.

Say it exactly like this:

"Hold hands. Yes, hold hands, it's two in the morning and nobody's watching.

"Feet flat. Everybody sitting. Nobody stands up in this one.

"Eyes closed. All of you. — Closed.

(Now drop the volume by half and slow down. Same firmness, less air. From here you speak in short lines with two seconds between them.)

"Feel the hand on your left. Feel the hand on your right.

"One of them is warmer than the other. Find which.

"There's a pulse in one of them. Yours or theirs. Doesn't matter.

(Hand on the first shoulder. Firm, flat, no squeezing.)

"Marek. My hand's on your shoulder. Feel the weight of it.

"Down.

"And as that weight goes down through your shoulder, it keeps going. Down the arm. Into the hand. Out the other side.

"It goes to Anna now.

(Two seconds. Then say her name. Not before.)

"Anna. It's arrived. Heavy hand, heavy arm, heavy shoulder — and out the other side.

"Jonas.

(Two seconds per person. Name, one line, name. Do not vary the rhythm, the rhythm is the routine. Keep your eyes on the shoulders — you are watching for the drop, and you will see it before they feel it.)

"Jonas. Heavy. Down. And out.

"Lena.

"Lena. Heavy. Down. And out.

"...and it stops at the end of the line. Nowhere left to go.

"Everybody. Whatever arrived, leave it where it is. Don't touch it.

"Some part of each of you already knows where in the chain it slowed down.

"And whether it went all the way round or stopped somewhere in the middle — either way six people just felt the same thing in the same order.

(Now send it back. Same order, reversed, twice as fast. The return trip is not decoration — it is how you take it off them.)

"Back the other way. Lighter every step. Lena. Jonas. Anna. Marek. — and out through my hand. Gone.

"Let go of each other. Eyes open. Look at the fire."

(Nobody in that chain was asleep. Nobody in this book is ever asleep. They are sitting with their eyes shut, doing something interesting, and not arguing with it.)

Hard rules for this one, and they are not negotiable. Nobody stands. If anyone starts to lean sideways more than about ten degrees, say their name, say "sit up straight", and carry on — do not stop the chain, a stop mid-line is more disruptive than a correction. And you always run the return trip, even if the outward trip did nothing at all, because the return trip is the ending and every ending gets spoken.

If it doesn't come — The chain gets to person two and someone opens their eyes and says "I don't feel anything." Do not defend it. Say the honest thing at normal volume — "That happens, you're at the wrong end of the line" — and keep going down the chain without them. If it dies entirely, close it properly anyway: "Everybody let go. Eyes open. That one needs a quieter fire than this." Never leave a chain hanging open, and never end on the person who broke it.

11.7 The Group Anchor

**ROUTINE 11.7 — The Group Anchor

What it is — One sound and one word belong to the circle for the rest of the night, and when you use them

the circle does something together.

How long — 2 minutes to set. Two seconds to fire, any time afterwards.

What you need — A bench or table you can knock on. A word the circle already owns.

Prerequisite — At least three routines landed, including one that involved the whole circle at once. Do not anchor a circle that has not yet done anything together.

Chapter 13 is where anchors get built properly and where the honest limits get spelled out. This is the small version, and it is the best closing move you have for a fire, because it means every routine you ran tonight stays available without you having to start from scratch each time.

Two channels, deliberately, because two is more robust than one at a noisy campsite: a sound and a word. Two knuckle knocks on the bench, quick, and one word. Take the word from the circle rather than inventing it — whatever their stupid in-joke of the weekend is. A word they already say fifty times a night is worth more than a good word you brought with you.

Ask first. Out loud, all of them, so nobody gets anchored by ambush: "I'm going to give the four of you a thing that works for the rest of tonight. Two knocks and a word. Anybody who doesn't want it, say so now and I'll leave you out — it's not a big deal either way."

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Everybody who's in — hands on the table. Eyes on my hand.*

(Knock twice. Knuckles. Hard enough to feel through the wood. Then say the word.)

"Two knocks. And the word.

"Right now you can feel the knock coming up through the table into your hands. You heard the word at the same time.

"And as those two things land together, they land on top of everything this circle has already done tonight — the hands, the count, the chain, all of it in one pile.

"Two knocks. And the word.

(Knock. Say it. Then wait four seconds — the gap is what makes the pair stand out from ordinary noise.)

"Two knocks. And the word.

"Some part of the four of you has already put those two together with the rest of it.

"So — later tonight, when you're not thinking about any of this and you hear it, you'll notice what your hands do before you've decided anything.

"And whether it's the whole thing coming back or just a flicker of it — either way you'll know exactly what it was."

Then say the true part, because this is where most people lie and there is no reason to.

Say it exactly like this:

"One honest thing. This isn't permanent and I'm not going to pretend it is. It works because we just did it and because you're all still sitting here. Use it tonight and it stays sharp. Leave it until Saturday and it'll be a shadow of this — we'd have to set it again, which takes about a minute. Nobody's stuck with anything.

"And if you want it gone, say so and it's gone. That's not a threat and it's not a favour, it's just how it works."

Fire it twice in the next thirty minutes — once soon, once when they have moved on to something else. Anchors that are never used are anchors that were never set.

If it doesn't come — You knock later, say the word, and four people look at you blankly. Do not knock again. Do not explain. Absorb it into whatever the circle was already doing — "ignore me, wrong table" — and let it go. An anchor that misses costs you nothing as long as you never announce it in advance. That is precisely why you never say "watch — this will work later."

The ones who don't go along

In every circle there are one or two. Not hostile, usually. Just not going. Their hands came apart on the first squeeze, their palm lifted off the bench instantly, and they are sitting there watching everyone else with an expression you cannot read.

Two things you do not do. You do not ignore them — an unattended non-responder builds up pressure and eventually says something, at the worst possible second. And you do not expose them. The moment you say "well, some people just aren't suggestible" in front of five witnesses, you have made that person a loser at their own campsite, and they will spend the rest of the night proving they don't care.

Three ways to handle it. Use all three across an evening, in this order.

One: pre-frame it before anyone can fail. Say this before the first routine, not after somebody flunks it. It costs eight seconds and it removes ninety per cent of the problem.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Before we start — some of you are going to go with this and some of you are going to sit there watching everybody else. Both of those are normal and I can't tell in advance which is which. The ones who watch usually get more out of it, and they're also the ones who see the good bits, so don't feel short-changed."*

Nothing there is a promise and nothing there can be disproved. But when Lena's hands come apart in the first three seconds, she is not a failure, she is the category you named in advance.

Two: name it once, warmly, and then leave it. One line, at normal volume, without pity in your voice, and then your eyes go elsewhere and stay there.

Say it exactly like this:

"You're a watcher tonight. Good — I need at least one. Stay where you are."

Then do not look at them for ten minutes. That last part is the whole technique. Most people who mess up a circle do it because the hypnotist kept glancing at them, and they correctly read it as being watched.

Three: give them a job. This is the one that converts a competitor into a participant, and it is the single most useful thing in this section. A job does three things at once: it makes them part of the machine, it stops them commenting, and it puts them in a position where they are agreeing with you constantly, which is not nothing.

Real jobs, in wording. Pick whichever fits the person.

Say it exactly like this:

"Do me a favour — you're on time. When I say go, count sixty in your head and tell me when you get there. Don't say it out loud, just tap the bench."

"You're on the fire. Every time it needs a log, put one on — don't wait for me, just do it quietly. If it goes out we're all going to bed."

"You've got the important one. Watch faces, not hands. If anybody looks like they're actually not enjoying this — not laughing, actually uncomfortable — you say stop and I stop, no discussion. You're the brakes."

That third job is not a decoration and it is not a trick to occupy someone. It is a genuine second pair of eyes, and on a dark campsite where you are running six

people at once, you want it. Give it to the sharpest sceptic in the circle. They tend to take it seriously, they are watching critically anyway, and now their critical watching is pointed somewhere useful.

And then, an hour later, re-open the door without making it a big moment. They have now seen four things work on people they know. That is worth more than any argument you could have made at the start.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You've watched four of these now. You want one, or do you want to keep watching? Both are real answers and I'm not going to talk you into anything."*

Roughly a third of them come in at that point. That is not a rescue — that is just expectation doing its job over an hour, which is the only thing that ever built expectation in the first place.

The one who laughs it apart

He is at every fire. Sometimes he is the funniest person in the circle, which makes it worse. Halfway through your best line he makes a noise, four people go, and you are standing there holding a routine that has nothing left in it.

Stop trying to suppress it. You cannot win a fight against a joke at two in the morning, and every attempt makes you the humourless one, which is the end of the evening. The move is to build the laughter in as part of the machine, so that it is running inside your structure

instead of against it.

Pre-frame the laugh so it isn't a rebellion. Say this before the first routine, in the same breath as the watcher pre-frame.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"This is going to be funny. It's supposed to be funny — if nobody laughs I've done it wrong. So laugh. It doesn't break anything."*

Now his laugh is compliance. You told him to do it and he did it. That reframing costs nothing and it removes the rebellion from the noise.

Use the laugh as the down-beat. A laugh is a burst of tension followed by an emptying-out, and the emptying-out is usable. Do not fight the burst, wait for it, then land on the bottom of it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *(Wait until the laugh is genuinely finished. Not almost finished. Finished. Then drop your volume and speed by half.)*
>
> *"Good. Get all of it out. All of it.*
>
> *"And now that it's gone — notice where your shoulders ended up.*
>
> *"Eyes closed. Down."*

Every laugh in a circle is a break, and every break is a place to come back in lower than you left. Three laughs in a row, used this way, do more than any deepener in Chapter 9 will do over a fire.

Give the loudest one the busiest role. Same principle as the job, different flavour. The person who cannot stop commenting gets made the announcer.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You're on commentary. When somebody's hands stick, you tell the circle what you're seeing. Loud. But only when it's actually happening — if you call it early you look like an idiot."*

Now his mouth has a schedule and it runs on your timing.

(Laughing does not break it. Being embarrassed breaks it, and from three metres away the two look identical.)

Which brings the one exception. There is a difference between laughing **with** and laughing **at**, and the second one is not a comedy problem, it is a safety problem. The moment the noise is aimed at one person — the tone changes, the volume goes up, somebody says a name in a particular way — you kill it immediately, in one flat sentence, without a joke attached.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"No. Not at him. At me if you want, I've got a bigger head."*

Say it at normal volume, do not look at the person you are correcting for longer than a second, and go straight back into the routine as if nothing happened. One sentence, no lecture. A lecture makes it a scene; a single flat sentence makes it a rule.

Bringing all of them back at once

The group exit is not the single exit run six times faster. It is its own thing, and it is the part most people do badly, because by then the good part is over and everyone wants to get on with the night.

Two facts drive the whole procedure. First: in a circle, one person can stay in a fog for several minutes and nobody will notice, because five other people are talking and laughing at exactly the volume required to hide it. Second: the ground around you is a campsite. Fire, dark, guy-lines, tent pegs at ankle height, empty bottles, somebody's dog, and a slope. A person who stands up half-there on a campsite is a real problem in a way that a person who stands up half-there in a living room is not.

So: nobody stands until every single one of them has said something out loud, to you, by name.

That is the whole reason for the round. A spoken answer proves three things in two seconds — the mouth works, the memory works, and the attention has come back to the outside. You cannot get that from looking at someone's face over a fire.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Everybody. Sit up. Both feet on the ground — actually do it, feet flat.*
>
> *"Eyes open. All of you.*
>
> *"Take a breath in through the nose. Bigger. And out.*

"Rub your hands together — go on, properly, until they're warm.

"Look at the fire. Look at the person opposite you. Look at your own boots.

"Now, one thing each, out loud, so I can hear it.

(Round the circle by name. One question each, and vary them — the same question six times lets people copy the answer in front of them.)

"Marek — what's the loudest thing you can hear right now?

"Anna — how many people are sitting at this fire?

"Jonas — what have you got in your left pocket?

"Lena — what's the first thing you're doing tomorrow?

(Listen to how the answer arrives, not what it says. You want it in one piece, at normal speed, first time. A slow one, a mumbled one, or a wrong one means that person gets another ninety seconds and one more question.)

"Good. All of you are back, everything you brought is still yours, and anything you didn't like about the last half hour goes on the fire with the rest of the rubbish.

"Two minutes sitting before anybody gets up. Drink something that isn't beer.

"Fire's on my left, there are guy-lines everywhere between here and the toilets, and nobody drives

tonight. Stand up when you feel like it — not before."

That last line is a statement, and the exit always ends on a statement. Never on a question. "Everyone alright?" invites six people to check whether they are, which is the last thing you want to hand them on the way out, and it also makes you sound worried, which is contagious.

If one person's answer comes back slow or thin, do not announce it. Keep the circle busy — "somebody put a log on" — and go and sit down next to that one person at their level. Low voice, this time in the one-on-one register, because the show is over and the register goes back with it.

Say it exactly like this:

"Stay sitting a minute, there's no rush. Feel the bench. Feel the cold on your hands. — Tell me what you had for dinner."

Then stay there until you get two normal sentences and a normal laugh. Two minutes of your night. It is not optional.

When It Goes Wrong

All six laugh at once and nothing lands. The circle has decided this is comedy rather than a game, and the decision is collective, which means you will not talk them out of it. Do not run another group routine. Shrink the field: pick your tier one, turn your body forty-five degrees so you are half out of the circle, and do one small thing with just him while the others keep talking. The circle will fall silent by itself within about fifteen seconds. Groups cannot resist watching a private conversation.

One goes deep and the other five get bored. This is the failure mode unique to circles and it is more common than any of the dramatic ones. You get a beautiful response from one person, you go to work on it, and by minute three the other five have started their own conversation and the atmosphere is gone. Park him and keep the circle employed. Say to him, quietly: "Stay just like that, eyes closed, nothing to do — I'll come back to you in a minute." Then turn to the circle and give them something at normal volume. Come back inside two minutes. Never longer, and never leave anybody parked when you finish for the night.

Two of them start competing. You will see it: one person's responses get bigger every round, then the other one's do. What you are watching is performance, and performance is not a disaster — a lot of what happens at a fire is somewhere between doing it and playing along, and the two are not cleanly separable. Do not call it out. Publicly exposing a faker in front of their friends is the cruellest thing you can do at a campsite and it kills the circle. Instead, give them both

the hardest thing you have, at the same time, with everyone watching. Under equal load the difference usually sorts itself out without anyone losing face, and if it doesn't, use them anyway. Someone who plays along enthusiastically is still a working part of a circle.

Someone drunk joins in the middle. He will arrive loudly, sit in the gap, and want in. He does not get to play, and the reason is craft, not morality — he will respond to nothing reliably, remember none of it, and change the way the whole circle behaves. Do not debate it. Give him a seat and a job in one sentence: "You're too late for this round, sit there and keep an eye on the fire." If he keeps pushing, stop the routine entirely rather than run it badly, and go back to talking. A circle that ends five minutes early is not a loss. A routine run around a drunk person in the middle of it is.

Somebody cries. Rare, but it happens, and in a circle the second problem arrives instantly: five people staring. Deal with the audience first. Say, at normal volume, without drama: "Right — everyone look at the fire for a minute." Then go to him, low voice, single register, one hand on the shoulder only if you have asked. Bring him out the ordinary way, slowly, with a question about something concrete — what he can hear, what he had for dinner. Do not ask what came up and do not treat it. If something real is underneath it, that belongs with a friend or a professional, and your job is to hand him back to his people in one piece and then let it go.

Somebody starts filming. Ask them to stop, and use the honest reason rather than a rule: "Put it down

— people behave differently for a lens, and it's not the same thing on camera." Then, once, to the person in the middle of a routine, because it is their evening and not yours: "Do you mind being filmed? No is fine." If they hesitate, that is a no. Deal with it in five seconds and get back to work.

A stranger arrives shouting. Campsites are permeable and someone will walk into the middle of your best routine. Do not compete with him and do not ask him to be quiet, which never works. Absorb him: greet him loudly by whatever he is holding — "there he is, the man with the crate" — hand him a place to sit, and let the circle laugh. Then restart the routine from the beginning rather than resuming it from where it broke. A resumed routine after an interruption is worth about a third of a fresh one.

Nothing happens at all, with any of them. It will happen, and probably this weekend. Six people, four routines, zero responses. That is not a broken technique, that is a circle that is too drunk, too new to each other, or too tired, and there is no wording that fixes any of the three. The exit is short and you take it before anybody has to be polite about it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Right — this lot is unhypnotizable. Genuinely, that's a real thing, some fires are just wrong for it. Someone put a log on."*

Then talk about something else and mean it. Do not offer a second round, do not explain what should have happened, and do not tell them it usually works. The last one is the worst thing you can say, because it

makes six people responsible for your evening. Most circles do not go. That is not failure, that is the arithmetic — and the circle you get on Saturday will not care what happened on Thursday.

Chapter 12 — The Campfire Show

Someone's speaker dies. That is usually how it starts. Half past one in the morning, the playlist stops in the middle of a song, and thirty people who were dancing badly are suddenly sitting around a fire with nothing to look at. Somebody says your name across the flames. Somebody else says: do the thing.

You have about ninety seconds before that moment leaks away. In ninety seconds the two girls on the far log will start their own conversation, the guy with the bottle will get louder because the room got quieter, and someone will find a phone with battery left and put music back on. Then it's gone, and you can stand up all you like — you'll be a man asking for attention instead of a man who was handed it.

So you don't prepare. You don't go and get your notes. You stand up on the word *thing*, you walk three steps to the left of the fire so your face is lit and not backlit, and you start.

What follows is a twenty-minute set that runs on one voice, four volunteers and a fire you must never stand behind. No stage, no microphone, no light of your own, no running order that anyone else in the circle knows. It is the hardest room you will ever work and the best one, because nobody there has ever seen this happen two meters from their own knees.

12.1 The Situation

Take stock honestly, because every decision that follows comes out of the list.

What you have.

A fire. It is the only light, which means it is also your lighting desk, and it moves. It gives you a natural center that everybody is already facing, seating that arranged itself an hour ago, and a reason for people to sit still and look at something. It also gives you noise — a fed fire crackles hard enough to eat the top of your consonants at four meters — and it gives you smoke that will pick a direction and follow you around like a dog.

Darkness. Darkness is a gift you did not earn. People do things in the dark they would not do under a strip light. Nobody can read faces at eight meters, so nobody in the back row can see the exact moment a volunteer looks silly, which means the volunteer is safer than he would be on a lit stage. Use it and stop wishing for a spotlight.

Alcohol in the environment. Not in your volunteers — we come back to that in 12.5 and it is not negotiable — but around them, in the circle, in the hands of the people who will comment. Assume a third of the ring is loose, warm, generous and impatient.

Tiredness. It's the third night, everybody slept four hours, and tired people are wonderful audiences and wonderful volunteers. They have stopped defending. They also drift, so anything that runs longer than four minutes without something happening loses them completely.

Expectation. Someone asked for this. That is worth more than any technique in the book. The circle has already decided that something is going to happen — your job is mostly to not get in the way of that decision.

What you don't have.

Light on your face unless you go and get it. Amplification. Rows of chairs, which means no fixed sightlines and no front. A running order anyone else knows, which means every transition has to be announced by you or it doesn't exist. A backstage. A stage manager. Anyone to hand you a chair, a bottle of water, or a volunteer.

And you do not have a second attempt. In a theater you can lose the first five minutes and win them back, because they paid and they will sit there. At a fire, a lost circle simply turns back into thirty people talking and it will not reassemble tonight.

(Nobody is being controlled here. Thirty people agreed to watch four people play, in public, at one in the morning. That is the whole of the thing, and it is plenty.)

12.2 Building The Ring

Before a word: geometry. You get about forty seconds to shape the space, and you do it while you're already talking, not before.

The fire goes beside you, never between you and them. This is the single most common mistake and it kills more campfire shows than bad scripts. Stand behind the fire and every person opposite you

sees a black silhouette wobbling in heat shimmer. They cannot read your face, your eyes, your hands. Worse, you cannot see theirs, and the whole set depends on you reading eleven faces at once.

So: step out of the ring at one point and stand at the edge of the fire's light, with the fire at your four o'clock, two to three meters away. Close enough that your face is orange. Far enough that you are not cooking. The fire lights you from the side, which is the most legible light there is.

Work an arc, not a circle. A full ring means half your audience is looking at your back at all times, and you will spend the whole set spinning like a lighthouse. Kill the far side. Walk over, and move four or five people around to the sides — physically, with your hands, while talking.

You are allowed to move furniture and people. Nobody has ever objected — at one in the morning everyone wants to be organized by somebody.

You want an arc of about 160 degrees in front of you, two or three deep, nobody further than five meters away. If the ring is too wide, tighten it before you start. **Move the ring, don't raise your voice.** Say it as a task, not a request:

> *"Everyone on that side — up, come round here, there's space. Two of you can sit on this log. Closer than that. Yes, that close. Thank you."*

The volunteer bench. You need a place for four people to sit, side by side, facing the crowd in profile — not facing the crowd head-on, and never with their backs to it. A log, a bench, a cooler box, the edge of a

pallet, four camping chairs pushed into a line. Put it at right angles to your arc so the audience sees the row from the side and slightly in front. That way the crowd sees a face and a moving hand at the same time, which is what the show is made of.

If there is no bench, they sit on the ground with a bag behind their backs. On the ground is fine. On the ground is better than a wobbly chair — nobody falls off the ground.

Feed the fire before you start, not during. A fire that has just been loaded with fresh wood is at its loudest and its most theatrical for about four minutes, then it settles. You want the settled version: enough light, less crackle. Load it now, wait two minutes while you build the ring, then hand the job away:

> *"You. You're the fire. Nobody else touches it for the next twenty minutes, including you — unless it's actually going out. If it goes out I'll look bad and you'll get the blame."*

That line does two jobs. It stops someone throwing a pallet on your set at minute twelve, and it gives one specific person — usually the loudest one — a role, which is the cheapest heckler prevention there is. More on that in 12.14.

Smoke. Wind picks a side. Stand upwind of the fire and stay there. If the wind turns, move and don't comment on it. A hypnotist coughing through his own induction is a comedy bit he didn't plan.

The dead zone. Find the two or three people who are lying down, wrapped up, half asleep at the edge. Leave them exactly where they are. Do not wake them into

being an audience. They are scenery, and they are on your side.

12.3 Taking The Circle Without Shouting

You cannot open with "Excuse me, everyone." That sentence has a smell. It asks permission from thirty people at once, and thirty people at once never grant it.

ROUTINE 12.3 — The Drop-In

What it is You take a talking circle's attention in under thirty seconds by starting the show instead of announcing it.
How long 25–40 seconds
What you need Standing room at the lit edge of the fire.
Prerequisite Ring built (12.2). Somebody asked for this, or somebody said your name.

Stand up on the sentence that mentioned you. Walk. Talk while you're walking — the walk is what turns heads, the voice only holds them once they've turned. Get to your spot, plant both feet, then stop moving completely. Stillness after motion is a spotlight you can carry with you.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Right. I need eleven of you and I need about twenty minutes. (Look at one person. Not the loudest one. The one who is already looking at you.) Not everyone. Eleven. If it's rubbish you can go back to whatever you were doing and I'll never mention it again. (Pause. Two full seconds. Let somebody laugh.) Hands where I can see them.*

Everybody. Both hands, out in front, palms together like you're about to clap and then don't. (Do it yourself while you say it. Don't wait for them to finish. Keep going.) Good. That's it. That's all I wanted — I wanted to see who does things."

Three mechanics are running there and you should know which is which. The number *eleven* is odd and specific, so it gets processed instead of skimmed; nobody hears "eleven" as a figure of speech. The permission to leave removes the reason to resist. And the hands-up instruction is a compliance test disguised as a joke — before you have said one word about hypnosis, you know who in that circle follows an instruction from you without arguing with it.

Count them. Not exactly — count the shape. If more than half the ring put their hands up, you have a show. If four people did it and the rest looked at each other, you do not have a circle yet; go back to 12.2, tighten the ring physically, and drop in again in ninety seconds with a different first line.

If it doesn't come Nobody moves, two people talk over you. Do not repeat yourself louder. Sit back down mid-sentence — "Fine, later" — and wait four minutes. A circle that refused you once will take you the second time if you did not make it a fight. If it refuses twice, the answer tonight is no. Go and do one-on-one work at the edge (Chapter 10), let three people see it, and let them bring you the circle at three in the morning.

12.4 The Voice Without A Microphone

Everything you know about being heard is wrong, because everything you know comes from arguing in a bar.

Slower, not louder. Cut your speaking rate by about a third. If you normally run at a hundred and fifty words a minute, you want a hundred. In the show scripts below, that means a full beat of silence between short sentences. Slow is the only volume control you have that costs you nothing.

Lower, not higher. Shouting drags your pitch up and thins your tone. What that does to a consonant on its way across eight meters I can't tell you, and anybody who can is guessing at you. What I can give you is the count. When I run the audibility check below, the lines that come back to me wrong are almost always the ones I shouted, and they come back as a shape with the edges gone — "Hands together" returns as "aaa uh-eh-uh". The low, chesty, unhurried version — "Hands. Together." — comes back whole. So I stopped shouting instructions. Not because of a theory about consonants. Because of which lines I kept having to say twice.

Speak from the bottom of the breath, not the top. Take air in through the nose before each line, let the line ride out on the first two thirds of the exhale, and stop before you're empty. A voice running out of air rises in pitch and everyone can hear the panic in it.

Six words. In the show register, your sentences are six words or shorter, and the important word goes last.

"Both arms straight out in front." "Eyes closed, and keep them closed." "The bucket is getting heavier now." Long sentences are for one-on-one work in Chapters 5 to 10, where you're forty centimeters from someone's face and nothing has to travel.

Pauses instead of volume. A two-second silence does what a raised voice cannot. It makes people lean in and it makes the last thing you said arrive twice. Learn to hold four seconds without your face apologizing for it. Four seconds is much longer than you think, which is exactly why it works.

(There is no such thing as a stage voice. There is a voice that carries and a voice that doesn't, and the difference is speed and air, not talent.)

Direction. Sound goes where your mouth points. Turn your head to address the far side; don't turn your body, because turning your body breaks the picture the crowd is watching. And when you speak to a volunteer in the row — this is the part everybody gets wrong — speak toward the crowd, not into the volunteer's ear. He is thirty centimeters away and can hear a whisper. The other twenty-nine cannot. Aim your voice past his shoulder at the far log.

The audibility check. Do it in the first ninety seconds, once, and never again. Pick the person furthest from you, use his name if you have it, and ask for a word back — not a nod. A nod is a lie people tell to be polite.

"Marek. What did I just say."

If he gives it back to you, you are audible and you never think about it again. If he can't, do not raise your voice

— raising your voice for the rest of the set will wreck it. Take two steps toward the far side, turn your head, and move the last two people in closer. Then run the check on somebody else.

Also watch for cupped ears and for a leaning body. Two leaners in your first minute means the same thing as a failed check.

One more thing about the fire. It is loudest low and hissy, and it competes hardest with sibilants. Words full of s-sounds — "so as this settles" — vanish into a fire. Sentences built on hard stops — "Down. Deep. Stop there." — cut through it. Build your show lines out of hard consonants and your quiet lines out of anything you like, because your quiet lines are for the four people sitting an arm's length away.

12.5 The Announcement

Two minutes, at the top, before anyone closes an eye. This is the part inexperienced people skip because it feels like admin. It is not admin. It is the frame, and without it your show is a man doing strange things to a drunk person in the dark, which is what a stranger walking past at half one will see.

ROUTINE 12.5 — House Rules In Forty Seconds

What it is The public frame: what this is, what it isn't, who can't play tonight, and the way out.
How long 90–120 seconds
What you need The circle's attention (12.3).
Prerequisite None. This one is never skipped, never shortened below the four things below.

The four things that must be said out loud, in front of everyone: **what they'll see**, **the way out**, **who isn't playing tonight**, and **hands off**.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Before anybody sits down here, four things. They take a minute. Listen to them, because they're the real ones.*
>
> *One. Nobody here is getting knocked out and nobody's getting made a fool of. What you'll see is people doing things they find funny while they're doing them. If a bit ever ends with somebody looking stupid, that's a bad bit and I've written it badly.*
>
> *Two. The way out. Anybody sitting on that bench says the word stop — just the word, not a speech — and we're finished, immediately, no explanation asked for and none given. That's not a formality. Two people have used it on me and both of them still had a good night.*
>
> *Three. If you've had a proper amount to drink tonight, or anything else, you're audience. That's not me being a nun about it. (Say the next line lightly. It has to land as craft, not as judgment.) It's that it doesn't work well and you won't remember it, and then I've wasted your twenty minutes and mine. Simple test: if you can ask me a clear question right now and still have the answer in a minute, you're in. If you're not sure, you're audience. Audience is the better seat anyway — you can see everything and you get to talk.*

Four. Nobody touches these four people except me, and I only ever take a hand, a wrist, or a shoulder, and I say it before I do it. If you're the type who thinks it's funny to poke your mate while he's sitting there — do it and I stop the whole thing. That's the only rule I'll be humorless about.

That's it. That's the admin."

Then, before the row is chosen, one more sentence, aimed at the whole circle, which is the piece almost nobody says and which pays for itself every time:

"And phones. If you want to film, ask the person you're filming afterwards, not now. If any of the four says no, it's no, and you delete it in front of them."

Two notes on the gate. Deliver the drinking rule as a piece of technical information, not as a moral position, because a moral position makes a drunk man argue and a technical one makes him shrug. And if you look at someone and are not sure whether they're under eighteen, they're audience — don't ask, don't make a thing of it, just don't pick them.

If it doesn't come Somebody argues with the rules — usually rule three, usually the person it applies to. Don't debate. "Might be right. Tonight you're audience, and I need you loud." Then look away and keep going. Arguing with a heckler about consent is how you lose a circle at minute two.

12.6 The Mass Test

Now the whole ring does one thing at the same time. This is the most efficient sixty seconds in the entire book: it entertains the circle, it warms up the shy ones, and it tells you exactly who belongs on the bench — without anybody being examined, judged or picked out.

The test has to be **visible at four meters in firelight**. That rules out most of Chapter 6. The finger vise (6.2) is superb one-on-one and invisible at four meters — nobody can see laced fingers in the dark. The eyelid test (6.6) is invisible too. What you need is arms, because arms are the biggest, slowest, most readable thing a seated human owns.

So you run the circle version of Balloon and Bucket (6.4), with the fire written into it.

ROUTINE 12.6 — The Whole Circle At Once

What it is Everyone in the ring runs one arm test simultaneously, then opens their eyes and sees the whole circle's hands in different places.
How long 90 seconds
What you need Nothing. Everyone seated, both arms free.
Prerequisite 12.5 said out loud.

Stand where the most people can see you, and demonstrate every single instruction with your own arms while you give it. In the dark, a spoken instruction is understood by about seventy percent of a circle; a spoken instruction plus a demonstrated one is understood by all of them.

Say it exactly like this:

"Everyone. Not just the brave ones — everyone, including the two of you lying down at the back. This takes one minute and it's the only thing I'll ask of the whole group.

Both arms out in front. Straight. Shoulder height. (Do it. Hold it. Wait until the slowest person is up. Three seconds.)

Left hand: palm up. Like you're holding a bucket. Right hand: palm down, flat. (Check the ring. Fix the ones who mirrored you, out loud, without singling them out: "Some of you have got them the wrong way round. Doesn't matter. Keep them where they are.")

Eyes closed. All the way closed, and leave them. (Two seconds of silence. Let the circle go quiet on its own. It will.)

There's a bucket hanging off that left hand. Empty, right now. And I'm filling it. (Slow. Six words a line. A beat between each.) Water going in. It keeps coming. And the more that bucket fills, the more that arm has to carry. You'll notice which arm gets the news first.

Now the right hand. There's a balloon tied to the back of it. A big one, the helium kind, the kind that gets away from children at fairs. It pulls up. It doesn't ask the arm's permission — it just pulls.

Bucket filling. Balloon lifting. And you don't have to help either one of them. (Ten seconds. Say nothing. Look along the ring and read it — this is the sixty seconds described in 12.7.)

Whether they've moved a lot or hardly at all, you'll feel exactly which hand is which.

Keep them exactly where they are — and open your eyes. Look at your own hands first. (Beat.) Now look at everybody else's."

That last instruction is the show. Thirty people open their eyes, see their own arms in two different places, and then see twenty-nine other people in the same state. The laugh that follows is the loudest sound of the night and you have not touched anyone yet.

Note what you did not claim. You did not say the arms would move. You said they'd notice which arm gets the news first, and you sealed it with *a lot or hardly at all*. Nothing in that script can fail, because nothing in it was a prediction.

If it doesn't come Six people move, twenty-four don't, and nobody laughs. Don't run it again and don't explain it. Take it as information and shrink the show: "Some of you are stubborn. Good. I only need four." Then go straight to the pick (12.8) using the six who moved. A flat mass test costs you the big laugh, not the set.

12.7 Reading The Circle In Sixty Seconds

While the bucket is filling and your mouth is running on autopilot, your eyes do the actual work. You have about ten seconds of them sitting with their eyes closed, and another ten after they open. That is your entire casting process.

Walk the arc slowly while you talk. Look at five things, in this order:

One — the split. How far apart are the hands? You are not looking for the biggest split; you are looking for a split that happened *smoothly*. An arm that traveled forty centimeters in a steady drift is worth more than one that jerked up in one motion, because the jerk usually means somebody decided to help.

Two — the eyes. Who kept them shut the whole time? This is the strongest single signal in the circle and it costs nothing to see. Peekers are not bad people and they are not resistant; they are simply not ready to stop monitoring, and monitoring is the one thing that has to go quiet for the rest of the set to work.

Three — the neighbor check. Who looked sideways before committing? Skip them for the bench tonight. They will do everything the group does, half a second late, and half a second late reads to the crowd as fake.

Four — the redo. Somebody laughs at their own arms, shakes them out, and does it again unprompted. That person goes on the bench first, every time. Wanting the experience beats being good at it.

Five — the disqualifiers. A can or a bottle in the hand during the test. Glassy eyes, over-loud laughing, the mate who has been holding him up since eleven. Someone whose partner is looking at you and shaking their head — trust that head shake, always, and never ask why.

Rank them in your head as you walk: four names or four descriptions ("green jacket, glasses, curly hair, the one with the blanket"). Have a fifth in reserve, because

one of your four will turn out to be somebody's boyfriend who says no.

And the arithmetic, honestly: out of thirty people at a fire, you will find four usable volunteers. Some nights you find two. That is not a verdict on you, it's the rate. The set below is built for four and runs perfectly well on three.

12.8 The Pick

The difference between a good campfire show and an audition is entirely in this minute. Selection must feel like *invitation*, and the people not chosen must feel like they got the better job.

ROUTINE 12.8 — Four Out Of Thirty

What it is You bring three to five people to the bench in under sixty seconds without it reading as casting, and give the other twenty-six a role.
How long 45–60 seconds
What you need The bench (12.2). Names if you have them.
Prerequisite 12.6 run and read (12.7).

Move while you talk. Go to each person, don't summon them across the fire. Standing next to someone and putting a hand out is an invitation; shouting "you, come here" across a circle is a summons, and a summons gets refused in front of an audience.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Four of you did that without arguing with it, and that's the only thing this needs. (Go to the first one. Crouch. Say it to her, at her level, not down at her.) You. Green jacket. You're in. Bring the*

blanket, it's cold. (Straight to the next. Keep moving. Speed is what stops it feeling like judgment.) You, glasses — yes, you. Sit on the end. (Third. Fourth. Then straighten up and speak to the whole ring.) That's it. That's the four.

Everyone else: your job is better and I'm not being polite. You get to see it — they don't. They'll be sitting there with their eyes shut and they'll have to take your word for what happened. So watch properly, and laugh when it's funny, and don't help them.

One thing that's not a joke: while they're sitting there, nobody says their name from over here. Not once. You'll see why in a minute."

Seat them shoulder to shoulder, hips almost touching, in a line at right angles to the crowd. Contact between neighbors is doing quiet work for you all night — a row that touches responds as a row, and one person's response spreads down the bench.

Put the strongest one — the redo, from 12.7 — on the end nearest you. He is your anchor, your demonstration, and your first pick for anything risky. Put the shyest in the middle, where the row's momentum can carry her.

Declining people gracefully. Somebody will get up who shouldn't. Usually the drunk friend, occasionally a kid. You handle it in one sentence, in front of everyone, with the reason pointing at you and never at them:

"You I want for the last bit — sit right there, don't go anywhere."

Then you never call on him and, at the end, you give him the last-bit job for real: he holds the torch, he starts the clap, he counts down with the circle. He got a role, he lost nothing, and nobody in the ring saw a rejection.

If it doesn't come Only two people come forward, or one of your four backs out on the way to the bench. Take two. Say it flat: "Two's fine. Two's better — you'll see more." Never plead, never do a second call for volunteers. A second call tells the circle that the show is short of something, and from then on they watch you instead of the bench.

12.9 The Row Induction

Four at once, two minutes, sitting on a log in the dark with thirty people watching. It uses the fire as the fixation object, which is the one thing at a campsite that beats a candle, a coin and a point on the wall: it moves, it's warm, everyone is already looking at it, and staring into it is something they have all been doing voluntarily for two hours.

ROUTINE 12.9 — The Row

What it is A group induction for three to five seated volunteers, built on fire fixation and one announced touch each.
How long 2 minutes
What you need The row seated, the fire in their eyeline, nothing else.
Prerequisite 12.5 (rules said out loud), 12.8 (row seated).
Related: 7.2 the shoulder drop, 7.4 fire fixation — this is the row version of both.

Before you start, one announcement about touch, to the row, not to the crowd. It must contain a live no:

"In a minute I'll put one hand on one shoulder, each of you, once. If you'd rather I didn't — say so now or put a hand up any time, and I'll skip you and it changes nothing."

Say it exactly like this:

"All four. Find one point in the fire. Not the flames. The dark part underneath, where it's orange and slow. (Five seconds. Nothing.) Keep it there. Your eyes do this bit, not you.

And the longer you hold that one point, the more the edges of everything else go soft. That's them getting ready. Blink when you want. Don't fight a blink. And the next time those eyes close — leave them closed. (Silence. Four seconds. Watch the row. Take the first pair of closed eyes and use them.)

Good. That's it. Eyes closed and they stay closed. (Step to the first one. Hand on the shoulder, flat, no grip.) Down. (One press. Downward. Two centimeters. Release.) All the way down. Head goes wherever it wants. (Move down the row. Same word, same press, same weight, same tempo. Never faster because it's working.) Down. — Down. — Down.

Ten. And with every number, further down that stair. Nine. Eight — heavier. Seven. (Slow down here. Between six and one, take twelve seconds. Everyone rushes this and everyone loses the row

doing it.) Six. Five. Nothing to hold on to now. Four. Three. Two — and the noise behind you can carry on without you. One. Stop there."

(No, they are not asleep. Nobody is ever asleep. They are four people sitting in the dark with their eyes shut, doing what you asked, and that is a far more interesting thing than sleep.)

Read the row from your feet up: shoulders dropped, hands gone slack on the thighs, head tipped four or five degrees, breathing slower than yours. You need two out of four looking like that. Two is a show.

If it doesn't come One of them still has his eyes open at sixty seconds. Do not go back for him, do not repeat the count, and never say his name in a disappointed voice. Promote him: "You — you're with me. Stand here, you're counting for me." He becomes your assistant, the crowd reads it as staging, and he leaves the bench with more status than he sat down with. If three of the four have their eyes open, don't induce at all — run the tests-only version in 12.13.

12.10 The Row Convincer

The circle does not need convincing, but the four on the bench do, and the crowd needs to *see* somebody being convinced. This is the moment the show stops being a curiosity and becomes an event, and it runs one at a time, down the line, so the crowd gets four escalating beats out of one idea.

ROUTINE 12.10 — The Lock Down The Line

What it is Each volunteer, in turn, finds one arm won't bend the way arms usually bend — and the whole circle watches them find it.
How long 2 minutes for four people
What you need Nothing. No touch required beyond the shoulder already announced.
Prerequisite 12.9. Related: 8.1 arm catalepsy.

Two safety rules that are not optional. You never press down on an extended arm, and you never let the audience test one. When somebody in the ring shouts "let me try it", the answer is a flat, cheerful "no", and you move on within a second so it doesn't become a topic.

Say it exactly like this, to the row, then to each in turn:

> *"All of you: right arm straight out. Fist closed. (Beat.) Stiff. Like a branch, not like an arm. Elbow locked. Locked hard.*
>
> *(Now to the first one only. Crouch beside him, speak past his shoulder toward the crowd.) That arm's got one job and it's doing it. And the more you try to bend it, the more that elbow decides to stay exactly where it is. Try. Try properly. (Two seconds. Let the crowd watch him try. Say nothing over it.) Whether it stops dead or just goes slow and stupid — you'll feel where it stops. (Take the moment back before the laugh finishes.) Stop trying. Let the arm drop. Twice as far down as before.*
>
> *(Second volunteer. Same words, faster. Third: faster again. Fourth: three lines only.)"*

Sequence matters more than script here. Run the strongest one first so the crowd learns what they are looking at, then the middle two, and finish with whoever gave you the biggest facial expression. Escalating speed down the line builds the wave described in 12.11 — same event four times, each shorter, is a rhythm, and rhythms carry a crowd through the dark better than novelty does.

And when the arm drops, always take a deepening beat out of it. Every convincer you spend should buy you depth on the way out.

If it doesn't come His arm bends on the first pull. Don't flinch and don't say "hm". Convert it instantly: "Good — that one's yours. Drop it. Twice as heavy going down." Then move to the next volunteer without a pause. The crowd cannot tell a failed convincer from a planned transition unless your face tells them. If it bends on all four, skip the numbers, run the finale early, and finish at twelve minutes (12.13).

12.11 The Set List

Twenty minutes, eight positions. Learn it as a shape, not as a script: announcement, everyone, pick, drop, proof, three bits, one big finish, everybody home.

Clock	Position	Runs on
00:00–02:00	Announcement and consent	12.3, 12.5
02:00–04:00	Mass test	12.6

Clock	Position	Runs on
04:00–05:00	The pick	12.7, 12.8
05:00–07:00	Induction	12.9
07:00–09:00	Convincer	12.10
09:00–17:00	Three numbers	10.3 · 11.4 · 10.8
17:00–19:00	Finale	11.5
19:00–20:00	Wake-up and full-awake buffer	12.15

00:00–02:00 · Announcement and consent. Must deliver: a frame. By minute two, thirty people must know that this is a game, that the bench can quit, that drunk means audience, and that nobody touches the volunteers. If it doesn't: you are not allowed to skip forward. This is the one position with no substitute and no short version below the four points in 12.5. If the circle is too loud to hear it, you do not have a circle — go back to 12.2.

02:00–04:00 · Mass test. Must deliver: one physical event experienced by more than half the ring, one laugh, and a casting list in your head. If it doesn't: shrink the claim, not the show. Six movers is enough to cast from. What you lose is the crowd's early buy-in, so you spend the induction position building it back — talk to the crowd more than usual between beats.

04:00–05:00 · The pick. Must deliver: three to five people on the bench inside sixty seconds, and a job for everyone else. If it doesn't: take two. Two volunteers plus a strong finale is a real show. What you must not

do is spend two minutes recruiting; the circle's patience for admin ran out at minute two and it does not come back.

05:00–07:00 · Induction. Must deliver: two of four with closed eyes, dropped shoulders and slower breathing. If it doesn't: you have a tests show, not a trance show, and that is a completely respectable evening. Go to 12.13, run the three-test version, and end early. Nobody in that ring knows what was supposed to happen next.

07:00–09:00 · Convincer. Must deliver: one undeniable, visible, physical moment per volunteer, and the crowd's first proper roar. If it doesn't: run one more, different in kind — if the arm failed, use something verbal, like the forgotten word (8.3), which reads perfectly in the dark because it's spoken. Two failed convincers in a row is your signal to cut to the finale.

09:00–17:00 · Three numbers. Must deliver: eight minutes of escalating, visible play. Roughly two and a half minutes each, and each one bigger than the last. If it doesn't: cut from the back, never from the front — see 12.13.

Which numbers? Not all of them survive a fire. Run every candidate from Chapters 10 and 11 through this filter first:

1. **Does it read at four meters in firelight?** Anything that lives in fingers, faces or eyelids is a one-on-one number, however good it is. Arms, whole bodies, standing, and *sound* are what read at night.

2. **Can the far side follow it with their ears?** Every number in a campfire show needs a spoken component, because a third of your audience can only half-see. A number where the volunteer says something out loud — a wrong number, a missing word, his own name arriving strangely — beats a purely physical one every time.

3. **Does it work sitting down and with no props?** No chair gags, no walking around, nothing you have to go and find. If it needs an object, it needs an object that is already at a campsite: a stick, an empty bottle, a hat, a phone.

4. **Does the volunteer come out of it looking good?** If the punchline is that he's an idiot, cut the number from your repertoire, not just from tonight. The people watching are his friends and they'll still be his friends on Sunday. Yours is the only reputation that gets built here, and it gets built on how the four are treated.

Small, then odd, then joyful. Never the other way around. Here is the set that comes out the other side of that filter, with the card that takes over when the first one can't be run. Learn both columns — you will use the second one more often than you expect.

09:00–11:30 · Verbal. First choice: **10.3 The Number That Vanished.** Sixty seconds to install, twenty-five to test, needs nothing at all, and the entire event is a sound — she counts to ten out loud and one number isn't there. A sound is the only kind of event the far log gets in full. Replacement: **10.2 The Name That's Gone.** Same size, same nothing required. You take it when the induction counted the row down from

ten four minutes ago and you don't want two counts in one set.

11:30–14:00 · Physical. First choice: **11.4 The Bench That Holds On**, run on the row and not on the ring. Four palms flat on the same wood, four people finding out the hand stays there after they decided to lift it. Whole arms read at four meters; fingers do not. The card lists 11.1 as its prerequisite; at a fire the mass test in 12.6 has already done that sorting for you, so you skip it and say nothing about it. Replacement: **10.1 The Glued Hand**, on the strongest volunteer only — for the nights when the bench is a round log or the ground and there is no flat surface all four can reach.

14:00–17:00 · Joyful. First choice: **10.8 The Laugh Trigger.** One agreed word stays funny for about four minutes, and a laugh is the one signal that arrives at eight meters undamaged. He comes out of it as the funniest person at the fire, which is filter four. Its card asks for two fractionation rounds you have no time for at a fire; the convincer in 12.10 is what buys you that depth instead, so if the arm locked on nobody, don't run this one. Take it back out before the wake-up — thirty seconds, and it is not optional. Replacement: **11.3 The Circle Count.** It moves the number off the bench and into the whole ring, which is what you want when the row is out of gas and the audience isn't. Don't run it in a set that already used 10.3; two missing numbers in eight minutes is one idea, not two.

And the ones the filter kills, so you are not working it out in the dark at minute nine. **10.6** and **10.7** live in a face and a private sensation, and there is nothing in

either of them for a crowd to look at. **10.5** and **10.10** both need standing, three checked meters and a spotter, and at night you have none of the three. **10.12** wants light on faces and lands three times in ten on a good night, in a lit circle, on somebody who has already passed four numbers — it is not a campfire number and it never was. **11.6 The Chain** is four to six minutes, which is your entire middle section spent on one idea.

17:00–19:00 · Finale. Must deliver: everybody in it, including the audience. The last two minutes should not be four people on a bench being watched by twenty-six — it should be thirty people doing one thing. Runs on **11.5 The Name Nobody Can Say**: one name goes out of the whole ring at once, everybody plays, and nobody on the bench is the joke. It is a three-minute card in a two-minute slot, and that is exactly where the minute you kept in hand goes. Replacement: **11.7 The Group Anchor.** Two minutes to set, two knocks and a word, and the circle keeps something it can use again later tonight — Chapter 13 has the honest limits on how long that lasts, and you say them out loud. If it doesn't: fall back to the biggest reaction you already got and repeat it deliberately as a curtain call — "One more time, all four" — because a repeat of a known laugh always outperforms a new idea at minute eighteen.

19:00–20:00 · Wake-up and full-awake buffer. Must deliver: four people fully oriented, seated, named, breathing, and still sitting sixty seconds later. If it doesn't: nothing else in the set matters. This position is never cut, never shortened, and never run while walking away. It is the reason the whole thing is

allowed to be fun. Full script in 12.15.

Two structural notes. **You never announce the running order.** The crowd should never know how many bits are left, because then they cannot tell that you cut two. And **you keep one minute in hand** — twenty minutes on paper is twenty-three in practice, because laughs cost time and laughs are the point.

12.12 The Wave

A reaction does not arrive in a group all at once. It moves, and the movement is the one thing in this chapter I have actually sat and timed.

Somebody on the bench does something. The four people with the clearest sightline go first — call it half a second. Their neighbors go about a second after that, and the thing worth watching is that the neighbors are looking at the neighbors, not at the volunteer. By two seconds it has crossed the arc, and the far side, who mostly could not see the thing itself, is laughing on trust. Then it peaks, then it falls away over roughly three more.

Counted under my breath at my own fires — one thousand and one, one thousand and two — start to silence comes in at five to six seconds. That is my count, not a law about crowds, and there is no study behind it. Count your own and use your number instead of mine. What matters is that there is a number at all, because it is the metronome of your show, and almost everything about riding it comes down to one instruction: **do not talk during it**.

Talking over a laugh does three things, all bad. The people laughing miss your line. The far side gets a mixed signal about whether the moment has ended. And you tell the whole circle that you don't trust what just happened to be enough. Stand still. Look at the volunteer, not at the crowd — looking at the crowd during a laugh is asking them for it, and asking makes it shorter.

Take the room back on the drop, not in the silence. I aim the next line at about two thirds of the way down the laugh, while it is still falling. I can't prove that is the best moment and I'm not going to pretend I can. What I count is the two ways of being wrong: come in over the top of it and I end up saying the line twice, wait for the ring to go completely quiet and I have to build the energy back from zero. Your entry is somewhere between those two, and you find it by getting it wrong about ten times.

Feed the far side. A third of your audience cannot see a hand on a knee at seven meters. So say what is happening, once, in five words, flat — not as commentary, as a stage direction to the crowd:

"Look at his left hand."

Then shut up and let them look. That line is the campfire equivalent of a spotlight and it costs you nothing.

When you are silent, on purpose. Four moments: during any laugh; for four seconds after any instruction to a volunteer, so the instruction has room to be acted on; for two seconds before your biggest line, because a pause makes the next thing sound decided; and

completely, for as long as it takes, when a volunteer is doing something and the crowd is watching it. The most common fault in a first campfire show is a hypnotist narrating over the only interesting thing in the ring.

Sightlines are wave management. If the crowd cannot see it, it doesn't spread. Before every number, glance at the arc and check that whatever is about to happen will be visible in profile. If it won't be, turn the volunteer's shoulders — with a hand on the shoulder, announced — before you start, not during.

Riding it up. The wave has a memory. Three medium laughs stacked with under twenty seconds between them build higher than one big one on its own, which is why the convincer runs down the line at increasing speed. If a laugh is bigger than you expected, don't move on — take one more beat out of the same idea immediately. Repeat the same bit on the person next to him. The crowd loves recognition more than surprise.

Riding it down. And there is a wave you have to break, not ride: the mean one. If the laughing turns and someone starts a chant, or the tone goes from *at what's happening* to *at him*, you kill it on the spot. Not by scolding the circle. By moving physically between the crowd and the volunteer, and by giving the crowd something else to do inside three seconds:

"Everybody — hands. Give him that, he earned it."

That converts a mean noise into applause using the same energy, and applause is the only thing that ends a mean wave without a lecture.

12.13 What You Cut When It's Going Badly

Every set list is also an abort plan, and yours has to be decided sober, in daylight, before you ever need it. Cutting at minute eleven while sweating is a decision nobody makes well.

The order things get cut, first to last:

1. **The joyful third — 10.8 The Laugh Trigger.** The one you're proudest of, the one with the longest install and a thirty-second removal you are not allowed to skip at the end. It goes first and it goes without hesitation, because it is the most expensive two and a half minutes you own and the one that fails hardest when the room isn't with you.

2. **The physical second — 11.4 The Bench That Holds On.** Same logic, and it also costs you four people arranged around a flat surface you might not have. Now you're running one number, and one number is enough to justify a finale.

3. **The stretch on the convincer — 12.10.** Run the arm down two people instead of four. Two arms in the dark is still an event.

4. **The build under the finale — the setup half of 11.5.** Shorten the ask, keep the payoff, get everyone in it anyway.

What survives all four cuts is **10.3 The Number That Vanished**: sixty seconds, no props, no bench, purely audible, and it works on a row that has half fallen apart. If your set collapses to one number, it is that one.

That is the cut list for a set that is going badly. It is not the same list as the twelve-minute version below, where nothing has gone wrong and you simply have less time. There you do the opposite: keep 10.8, drop 10.3. A short show that is working should end on the loudest thing you own.

What is never cut, in any circumstance:

• The four points of the announcement (12.5). No frame, no show.

• The mass test (12.6), because it is the position that entertains the twenty-six who are not on the bench, and those twenty-six are your actual audience.

• The wake-up and the full-awake buffer (12.15). Not shortened, not merged into the goodbye, not done while people are already standing.

The twelve-minute version. Learn it as a real set, not as an emergency. It is the one you'll actually run most often, because most nights something is off: wind, a noisy neighbor camp, a circle that's three quarters asleep.

Clock	Position
00:00–01:30	Announcement, all four points, faster delivery
01:30–03:30	Mass test
03:30–04:30	Pick — three people, not four
04:30–06:30	Induction
06:30–08:00	Convincer, two volunteers only

Clock	Position
08:00–11:00	One number — 10.8, the joyful one, not the clever one
11:00–12:00	Wake-up and buffer

There is no finale in the twelve-minute version. 10.8 *is* the finale, because it is the one that ends with the volunteer looking good and the crowd making noise. If the row is too shallow to carry it, run 10.3 there instead and accept a quieter ending.

The tests-only show. If the induction doesn't take on anybody — and some nights it doesn't — do not spend six minutes trying to force it in public. Change the genre without announcing that you changed it. Run three whole-circle tests back to back, each bigger than the last — **11.1 The Group Hand Lock**, then **11.2 The Passed Yawn**, then **11.3 The Circle Count** on your clearest responder from 11.1 — and finish. The circle experiences it as a complete, deliberate, eight-minute piece of entertainment, because the only person who knows there was supposed to be an induction is you.

How to make a cut invisible. Three rules. Never say what you're skipping. Never look at your watch or your phone — a hypnotist checking the time is a man telling thirty people he is behind. And bridge every cut with a forward sentence, not an apology:

> *"Right — the good one."*

That's it. That's the whole transition. Say it with your feet planted and the crowd will believe you jumped

forward on purpose, because you did.

12.14 Hecklers

Start from the correct premise: the heckler is audience. He is not an opponent, he did not come to ruin your night, and beating him is worth nothing. Every second you spend defeating a heckler is a second the other twenty-nine spend watching a fight instead of a show — and if you humiliate him, you become the villain in a circle where he has friends and you probably don't.

Three types. You will meet all three before you meet a fourth.

The drunk one. Loud, friendly, wants to be in it, keeps announcing that he's not hypnotizable. He is not a volunteer — that was settled in 12.5 — and telling him again will only start the conversation you don't want.

Give him a job. Not a fake job; a real one, with a consequence attached:

> *"You. I need you, actually. Stand here, this side of me. Your job is: nobody walks between me and them. People will try. Don't let them. That's a real job — if it goes wrong, that's the show gone."*

If he keeps talking during the set, don't shush him. Use his job:

> *"Marc. Two minutes. Then I need you properly."*

And at the end, pay him: name him to the circle, thank him for the job, let him take a small bow. He'll tell people about the show for two days.

If that doesn't settle him: stop looking at him entirely. Attention is the only currency here, and a heckler with no eye contact from the front runs out of fuel in about ninety seconds. What you never do is ask the crowd to deal with him — that turns your circle into a mob and mobs are not audiences.

The skeptic. Arms folded, sitting slightly back, says it out loud: they're playing along, it's fake, you can't hypnotize anyone who doesn't want to be.

He is mostly right, and the fastest way to disarm him is to say so, publicly, without sarcasm:

> *"Half of that's true, and I'd rather you said it out loud than sat there thinking it. Nobody up here has lost their mind and nobody's under my control — they're four people who agreed to play in front of thirty of their mates, which is the harder thing. So do the next one with the rest of the circle. Don't try to pass it and don't try to fail it. Just do it, and then tell everybody what actually happened. You'll be a better witness than me."*

That does three things: it agrees with him, so there's nothing to push against; it hands the circle an honest description of what they're watching, which raises your credibility with everybody else; and it moves him from commentator to participant.

If that doesn't land — and about half the time it won't:

> *"Fair enough. Keep score for me."*

Then leave him completely alone. Never target the skeptic with a routine to prove a point. If it works you've won an argument nobody was enjoying, and if it

doesn't you've handed him the evening.

The mate who wrecks the volunteer. The dangerous one. He is not attacking you, he's playing with his friend — shouting his name, filming from thirty centimeters, poking his shoulder, telling him he looks like an idiot. He breaks the volunteer's frame, and the volunteer is the person you're responsible for.

Move first, talk second. Put your body between him and the bench so the sightline is broken, then say it low, close, and without heat — this is the only time in the show you speak to one person instead of to the circle:

> *"Kev. He can hear every word you say. That's the whole reason I need you quiet — you'll wreck the exact thing you came over to watch. Sit there, right at the front, best seat. Two minutes."*

Front seat, on your side of the bench, out of the volunteer's eyeline. Proximity is control here: a heckler at your elbow behaves, a heckler at eight meters does not.

If that doesn't work, stop the number — don't push through it. Wake that volunteer, cleanly and completely, with the full script from 12.15, and put him in the audience next to his friend:

> *"You two sit together, you've earned each other."*

You lose one volunteer and you keep the show, the friendship and your reputation. That trade is always worth it.

The one rule under all three. Never a comeback that costs somebody face. Not one. The line you'd get a

laugh with is the same line that turns a warm circle cold, and at a campfire the cold lasts the rest of the night because nobody has to stay.

12.15 Stopping

Stop three minutes before you could. Every good campfire show ends with someone saying "do another one" and you saying no.

The reason is not modesty, it's arithmetic. Your fifth number will be worse than your third, because you're out of your best material and the circle is out of attention. And what people remember about a twenty-minute set is the last ninety seconds of it. Ending on a rising laugh with four people looking pleased with themselves buys you the rest of the festival. Ending on a bit that got a polite noise at minute twenty-eight buys you nothing, and you'll spend Saturday not being asked.

There is also a practical version of this rule: end while the fire is still good. When the fire drops, the light drops, the temperature drops, and the circle physically loosens — people go for jackets, for the toilet, for more drink. You cannot beat a dying fire. Watch it, and if it's getting low at minute fourteen, run the twelve-minute version and finish on top of your own show.

ROUTINE 12.15 — The Last Ninety Seconds

What it is Bringing the whole row back up together, holding them seated through a full-awake buffer, and handing the fire back to the circle.
How long 90 seconds. Never less.

What you need Nothing. Everyone stays seated.
Prerequisite Every show. Every time. Including the ones where you think nothing happened.

Say it exactly like this:

"All four. Sitting up. In a moment — not yet — everything comes back up. Both feet flat on the ground. Find the ground. Hands on your own knees. One breath that goes further than the last one. (Take one yourself, audibly. They'll follow it.)

Three. The fire comes back. The noise behind you comes back. Two. Cold on your face, smoke, somebody laughing over there. One — eyes open, all the way up, wide awake. (Flat and firm. Not loud, not sung. This line is an instruction, not a question, and it never ends on one.)

Stay sitting. All four of you, nobody stands up yet. (To the circle, so it lands as staging, not as a medical procedure:) There's a fire two meters that way, guy ropes everywhere and it's pitch dark, so they sit for a minute like everybody else.

Tell the person next to you your own name and one thing you're doing tomorrow. (Let them. Ten seconds. Listen to the sound of it, not the content — you want normal conversational speed and volume. Slow, dreamy speech means you wait another minute.)

Water, not beer, for the next ten minutes. Both of you — pass that bottle down. (Sixty seconds seated, minimum, from the count of one. Use the time to talk to the crowd, so the buffer never reads

as a safety procedure. It is one, but the circle doesn't need to think about that.)"

(That shiver is not the trance coming out of her. That's a girl at two in the morning who has been sitting still for twenty minutes. Give her the blanket and stop diagnosing.)

Then the closing line. It goes to the circle, not to the bench, and it gives the credit away:

"That's all of it. Everything you just watched, they did. I only talked. They're the ones with the good stories. Fire's yours again."

Then sit down. Physically, in the circle, on the ground, next to somebody. That is the frame break, and it does more than any words: the man who was standing is now sitting, which tells thirty people the show is over more clearly than an announcement could. Do not stay standing to take questions. Do not do "just one more" for the three people who ask. Sit down and become audience.

One last piece of housekeeping, twenty minutes later. Find each of the four, separately, quietly, away from the circle. Not to check on them like a nurse — one question, in a normal voice:

"What do you actually remember?"

Listen. If something odd comes up — a memory that surfaced, a strange feeling, something they can't place — name it as imagination immediately and without drama: "That's the same place dreams come from. It's not a report from anywhere." Then, if they want more, that's a conversation for tomorrow in daylight, not a

second session at the fire.

And tell them the honest thing about anything you anchored (Chapter 13): it fades, it needs refreshing, and it will be mostly gone by Saturday unless you both use it. Nothing you did tonight is permanent, and pretending otherwise is the cheapest lie in this trade.

If it doesn't come One of them doesn't open their eyes on "one". Do not repeat the count louder and do not touch her face. Kneel to her level, use her name, and give a smaller, easier instruction: "Sofia. Wiggle your toes. Good. Now the fingers. Eyes when you're ready — take the time you want, I'm right here." Turn your body to the crowd and say one bored sentence — "She's taking her time, they do" — so the ring keeps its tone. Full protocol in Chapter 14; at a fire, the two things that matter are that you stay calm and that you never leave her side.

When It Goes Wrong

The set tips. It happens like this: minute thirteen, the numbers aren't landing, a couple of people have drifted back to their own conversation, one volunteer has half-opened his eyes and is looking at his friends, and somebody at the back says, loud enough, "this is fake". The temperature of the ring changes in about four seconds, and everything you try from that point makes it worse if you try it from the front.

The instinct is to push — one more bit, a bigger one, prove it. Push and you will be doing hypnosis at people who have decided to watch you fail, with four

volunteers stuck in the middle of it. Don't push. Take the exit, and take it on purpose, at a speed that looks like a decision.

The ordered exit, in order.

One. Stop the number mid-sentence. Not at a natural end — there isn't going to be one. Just stop. Then do the single most useful thing available to you: say nothing for two seconds and stand still. A circle that expected you to argue and got silence resets its expectations immediately.

Two. Don't defend anything. Not the routine, not hypnosis, not the volunteers. One flat, unbothered line to the whole ring, and then never return to the subject:

> *"Some of it works, some of it doesn't. That's the deal with this."*

If you argue, the show becomes a debate and the four people on the bench become exhibits in it.

Three. Bring the row back as one unit, not one at a time. Individual wake-ups take four minutes and you don't have four minutes. Get in front of the bench, block the crowd's sightline with your body, and run the full script from 12.15 on all of them together — feet, hands, breath, three-two-one, eyes open. Firm, unhurried, and at the same volume you have used all night. The single thing that decides whether this reads as a calm ending or a collapse is your tempo. Speed up and thirty people learn that something went wrong.

Four. Buffer them anyway. All of it. The sixty seconds seated, the names, the day, the water. This is precisely the moment people skip it, and it's the

moment it matters most, because a fire, guy ropes, darkness and an unhappy crowd is the worst combination for somebody standing up too fast.

Five. Give the credit away and hand the fire back. Same closing shape as 12.15, delivered without a trace of apology in it:

> *"Right — that's them done. They sat there and did all of that in front of you lot, which is more than I'd have done. Give them something. (Start the clap yourself. Two claps is enough to start thirty.) Fire's yours again."*

Applause solves the tipped circle. Not because it's a trick, but because it gives a room full of mixed feelings one single thing to do together, and the thing it gives them to do is generous.

Six. Sit down inside the circle and let somebody else talk. Immediately. Do not stand near the fire looking thoughtful. Do not go and get your bag. Sit next to the loudest person in the ring and ask him about something that has nothing to do with you.

Seven. Twenty minutes later, find the four. One at a time, quietly. Ask what they remember. Tell each of them the true thing, which is that the bit that failed was the bit you wrote badly, not something they did wrong. That sentence is the whole of aftercare here. People do not go home from a campfire show upset about hypnosis; they go home upset about having been the person it didn't work on in front of their friends, and one honest sentence from you takes that away entirely.

The three failures inside the failure. Walking away while a volunteer is still sitting there with his eyes shut, because you were embarrassed. Waking people up fast and loud, which turns an ordinary ending into an event people talk about wrongly. And explaining. Explanation is the sound of a man who has lost a room. Say less than you want to, wake everyone completely, give the credit away, and sit down among them.

Everybody awake. Everybody whole. Everybody in a decent mood. That is the whole standard, and it is the only part of tonight that isn't optional.

Chapter 13 — Anchors That Survive Until Saturday

Saturday, 11:40 in the morning. The girl from Thursday night walks past your tent with two bottles of water and a folding chair under one arm, and she stops, and she says: "Do that thing again."

She doesn't say which thing. She can't name it. What she has kept is that there was a word, and that the word did something, and that it was Thursday and now it is Saturday and she would like it back before the queue for the showers gets long.

That moment is the entire subject of this chapter. It is also the exact spot where most of what gets said about anchors falls apart, because the honest answer to "do that thing again" is not "watch this". The honest answer is: it depends on what you did on Thursday, how cleanly you did it, and whether anybody touched it on Friday.

13.1 Four Sentences, Then We Stop

An anchor is a stimulus you attach to a state. The state has to already be in the room — you cannot attach a label to something that isn't there. You attach it by delivering the stimulus at the top of the state, cleanly, and then by delivering it identically every time after that. From then on, the stimulus tends to bring back some version of the state, and how much of a version depends almost entirely on how often it gets used.

That is the theory. There is no more of it in this chapter.

(No, you are not installing anything. Nothing gets installed in anybody. The word is a bookmark in a book she already owns.)

What follows from those four sentences is more useful than the sentences themselves:

An anchor cannot manufacture a state she has never had. If she was never relaxed on Thursday, there is nothing for the word to fetch on Saturday. Weak anchors are almost always the receipt for a weak state, not for bad technique.

An anchor does not make anybody do anything. It brings back a feeling, or a fraction of a feeling. Whether she then closes her eyes, laughs, sits down or ignores it entirely is hers. If you were hoping for a button, this is the chapter where you find out there is no button.

An anchor is a copy of a copy. Each firing returns a version of the last version. Fired well and topped up, it stays recognisable. Fired sloppily — different pressure, different tone, different spot on the shoulder — it blurs into something generic within a day.

And an anchor belongs to her, not to you. You set it, she carries it around the campsite for three days, she hears it fire at times you will never see. That asymmetry is why §13.8 exists and why it is not optional.

Three channels are worth your time on a campsite: a word, a touch, a sound. Take one. Two if the second is a

sound, because sounds fire themselves. Never all three on the same person on the same evening — you will end up with three half-set triggers instead of one that works.

13.2 Channel One: The Word

The word is the channel you will use most, because it costs nothing, it crosses two metres of noise, and it works when your hands are full.

Choosing it is most of the job. Rules, in order:

It cannot be a word anybody says here. Not "sleep", not "down", not "relax", not "easy", not "gone". Those get said by accident forty times a night around a fire, and a trigger that fires by accident forty times is a trigger you have taught to mean nothing.

It cannot be anyone's name. Not hers, not her boyfriend's, not the dog's, not the name of the campsite or the stage. Check the group first. If there is a Lena in the circle, Lena is out.

Two syllables. Stress on the first. You will be saying this at two in the morning, half a metre from an ear, at low volume, over a sound system a field away. Long words lose their ending. One-syllable words get swallowed.

No hard consonant cluster at the end. "Kestrand" dies in the noise. "Kestra" survives.

It has to be sayable with a straight face on the fifth repetition. Say your candidate out loud five times before you use it. If it still feels theatrical on the fifth, drop it. You cannot deliver a word flatly if it

embarrasses you, and a word delivered with a smirk anchors the smirk.

Candidates that pass all five: *Marlow. Kestra. Onda. Vellum. Harbin. Nomo.* Invent your own — an invented word ending in a vowel is nearly always fine.

ROUTINE 13.1 — Naming It

What it is You give the state she is already in a name, at the top of it, and then say the name once more while it is still up.
How long 25 seconds inside an existing state.
What you need Nothing. A word you chose before you sat down.
Prerequisite A state worth naming — anything from the openers, the inductions or the convincers that actually landed, and that is still visibly on.

(Half the volume you were using. Your mouth about half a metre from her ear, no closer. Do not lean across her — sit at forty-five degrees, on her side, not in front of her.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *Stay exactly where you are. Nothing to change, nothing to hold onto.*
>
> *And while your hands are as heavy as they are right now, and that music over there keeps going on without you — I'm going to give this a name.*
>
> *The name is* **Marlow**.
>
> *That's all it is. A name for this.*
>
> *You don't have to remember it. Something in you is already doing that.*
>
> *(Pause. Two seconds. Do not fill it.)*

Marlow.

And as you hear it a second time, you might notice a little more of it settle, or you might notice almost nothing — either way, the name is on it now.

(Then stop. Do not explain what you just did. Explanations at this point cost you the state.)

The immediate test — after the interruption, not before. Bring her up. Talk about something flat and ordinary for forty seconds: the queue for the toilets, whether the bread stand is still open, the state of her shoes. Then, in the middle of your own sentence, at ordinary volume, with no change in your face:

— and I still don't know how anybody sleeps through that bass, **Marlow***, so I've given up trying —*

(Stop talking. Count three seconds. Watch her hands, not her face.)

If something moves — a delay, a drop in her voice, her hands going still, her eyes losing focus for a beat — you have a hit. Then, and only then:

There it is. As much of it as wants to come. That's yours now, you don't have to do anything with it.

If it doesn't come Don't say the word again. A trigger fired twice into nothing is a trigger learning to mean nothing. Carry on with your sentence as if the word was part of it, let the conversation run for two minutes, then rebuild the state properly and set it once more on a better peak. If she asks what the word was for, tell her the truth: "That was me trying to bookmark it. Didn't take. We'll do it again in a minute or we won't, it's no

tragedy either way."

13.3 Channel Two: The Touch

A touch anchor is the strongest of the three outdoors, and it is the one that demands the most care. Both of those facts have the same cause.

It is the strongest because it is the only channel not competing with anything. A word has to get through a sound system, a crowd, a generator and somebody's speaker. A sound has to be distinguishable from four hundred other sounds. Skin has no queue. Three fingers on a shoulder arrive at full volume at three in the morning in a field with no lights, exactly as they arrived at nine in the evening.

It demands the most care for two reasons, and neither is squeamishness. First: a touch that arrives unannounced, at night, on a campsite, from someone she met four hours ago, is read as a different kind of event entirely — and she is right to read it that way. Second: a touch anchor only fires when you are standing next to her. It has the shortest reach of the three. It cannot survive Friday on its own, because Friday is when you are somewhere else.

The rules are narrow and they do not bend:

Two places only. The flat top of the shoulder, or the back of the wrist. Not the inside of the wrist, not the neck, not the back, not the face, not the knee. The top of the shoulder is the plate of muscle where a rucksack strap sits. The back of the wrist is the side

with the watch.

Permission before every single firing. Not once at the beginning of the weekend. Every time, out loud, in a form that allows a no without a discussion. The words change, the function doesn't.

Identical pressure, identical duration, identical spot. Three fingers, flat, about the pressure you would use to stop a door drifting closed. Four seconds. If you fire it once with two fingers for two seconds and once with a whole hand for six, you have taught it to mean "something vaguely near my shoulder", and that is what will come back.

Never on someone who is standing with their back to the fire in a group that has been drinking. Not because of what it is. Because of what it looks like from six metres away, and because you will be explaining it to somebody's friend instead of running your evening.

ROUTINE 13.2 — The Four-Second Shoulder

What it is A silent marker set on the top of the shoulder at the peak of a state, with spoken permission before it and nothing said during it.
How long 15 seconds to set. Four of those are the press.
What you need Her permission, out loud, each time. One hand.
Prerequisite A state that is visibly on, and a person who is sitting or leaning — not standing free in the dark.

Permission first. Say it exactly like this:

> *Before we go on: I'd like to put my hand flat on the top of your shoulder — here, where a strap sits — for about four seconds. That's the whole thing. If you'd rather I didn't, say so and we'll use the word*

instead, it makes no difference to me.

(Wait for an actual yes. A shrug is not a yes. If she looks at her friend before answering, that is not a yes either — that is her checking the room, and the answer you'd get is the room's.)

Then, at the peak:

Stay there. Nothing to do.

(Place the hand. Flat, three fingers, four seconds. Say nothing during the press. Count it in your head — four, not three, not six.)

(Lift the hand cleanly. No stroking, no pat, no second contact.)

And that's the marker. It doesn't ask anything of you.

The immediate test. Bring her back up. Thirty to sixty seconds of ordinary talk. Then permission again — yes, again, thirty seconds later, and yes, in different words:

Hand on the shoulder again, same as before, four seconds — all right?

(Same three fingers. Same spot. Same four seconds. Then, quietly, once:)

And you'll notice how much of it comes back on its own, without you doing anything to help it.

Watch the shoulder itself, not her face. The tell here is usually a drop of a centimetre or two, and a breath that arrives late.

If it doesn't come Take the hand away on the count of four exactly as
planned, and say nothing about it. Do not press harder, do not hold longer, do not try the other shoulder. Go back to talking. If she says "was something supposed to happen?", the answer is: "Not supposed. That's a marker, not a switch — markers get sharper with use and this one's an hour old." Then let it go for the evening and use the word channel instead, which costs her nothing.

13.4 Channel Three: The Sound

This is the festival-specific channel and the best of the three, and the reason is arithmetic rather than magic: a sound anchor fires without you.

The word needs your mouth. The touch needs your hand. The song from the main stage needs nothing at all — it plays at half nine, and again at midnight, and again on Friday, and it fires whether you are asleep in your tent, in a queue, or three hundred kilometres away. Anything that fires itself gets rehearsed. Anything that gets rehearsed survives until Saturday.

Three sources, in descending order of usefulness:

The can. A ring-pull opening is the most reliable trigger on any campsite in Europe. You control it, it costs nothing, it is identical every time, and there are four hundred of them within thirty metres. Use it with people who are drinking water and soft drinks as readily as with anybody else — the hiss is the hiss. Set it about twenty centimetres from her ear, off to the side, never in front of her face.

The call the group already has. Every camp has one by the second night: a shout when somebody comes back from the food stand, two claps, a bad impression of a stage announcer, a phrase from an inside joke. This is the finest anchor material at the whole festival, because the group will fire it forty times a day for its own reasons and none of them are yours. It also has the advantage of being entirely public — everybody in that circle knows the noise, so nothing about it is hidden.

The song. Weakest to set and strongest to keep. You cannot usually set it live, because the main stage does not take requests at the moment your volunteer's arm locks. So you set it by proxy: at the peak, you hum the four-note hook, twice, low. Later, the actual song does the firing. A proxy is a weaker link than the real thing — but it gets fired six times before Saturday, and six weak firings beat one strong one that never repeats.

The caveat belongs here rather than later: a sound you do not control fires when it wants. That is exactly why it survives, and exactly why it is the channel most likely to go off at a moment nobody chose. Read the last section of this chapter before you use the song on anyone.

ROUTINE 13.3 — Borrowing the Main Stage

What it is You attach the state to a noise the festival will keep making by itself — a can, the group's own call, or the hook of a song from the big stage.
How long 20 seconds to set.
What you need A cold can, or a noise the group already makes, or four notes you can hum without laughing.

Prerequisite A state that is on, and a sound she will meet again within the next twelve hours.

(Hold the can twenty centimetres from her ear, off to her side. Do not let her see it coming — not to trick her, but because a person watching a can is a person doing arithmetic.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *Just stay with it. There's nothing here that needs your attention.*
>
> *And with your breathing doing what it's doing on its own, and the bass still going over there — in a second there's going to be a small sound, and it doesn't mean anything, it's just a sound.*
>
> *(Open the can. One clean crack. Then nothing — three full seconds of silence.)*
>
> *And that's the one.*
>
> *Something in you already filed it. You don't have to know how that works — nobody does, really.*
>
> *(One more crack is not available. You get one can. Set it once.)*

For the song, replace the can with the hook, hummed twice, low, at the peak, and say afterwards:

> *That's the bit. It'll be back on tonight and you'll hear it about four times before Sunday, and whatever comes back with it — the whole thing or a thin version of it — you'll be the one who notices what turns up.*

The immediate test. Ten to fifteen minutes later, with her fully back and mid-conversation, open a second can behind her right shoulder while she is talking. Do not announce it, do not look at her, keep your own sentence going. Then watch the hands for three seconds.

If it doesn't come Say nothing about the can at all. Hand it to her. An anchor that fails silently costs nothing; an anchor you announce and then explain has cost her a small piece of trust and cost you the option of trying again in an hour. If the group asks what you were doing, "I was opening a drink" is accurate and sufficient.

13.5 Setting on the Peak

Everything above depends on one piece of timing, and it is where nearly every anchor on a campsite dies.

You set on the peak. Not after it. The peak is not the loud part.

The loud part — the laugh, the "oh my god", the look across at her friend, the hand coming up to her mouth — is not the state. That is the return trip. If you set your word there, you have anchored the return trip, and what comes back on Saturday is a person laughing and looking around for her friend. Which is not useless, but it is not what you thought you were building.

The peak is the two or three seconds before she comes back up. Learn it by its tells:

• **The pause before she answers stretches past two seconds.** This is the single most reliable one. Ask her something trivial and count. Under a second is a

person being polite. Past two is worth a marker.

• **The small corrections stop.** No shifting weight from foot to foot, no adjusting the sleeve, no fingers rearranging themselves. Hands that were fidgeting five minutes ago are lying where they landed.

• **Blink rate drops, or the lids flutter fast and low.** Either counts. It is the change that matters, not the direction.

• **A swallow.** Often right at the top.

• **The voice drops in pitch and volume, and the sentences get shorter.** Four-word answers from someone who was talking in paragraphs.

• **The head goes three or four degrees off centre and stays.** Not a nod. A drift that doesn't correct itself.

Two of those together is a peak. One on its own is a tired person at a festival at one in the morning, and there are eleven thousand of those here.

Your window inside a locked-arm convincer is roughly six to ten seconds long: from the moment it locks to the moment she starts testing it against herself. Set inside that. If you find yourself thinking "in a second I'll set it", you have already missed it — set it now, half-formed, on the state you have, because a marker on a small clean peak beats a marker three seconds late on a big one.

And the correction that saves you the most evenings: **you get one clean shot per peak.** Not three. If you say the word, get nothing, and say it twice more to help it along, you have not reinforced anything. You have

shown the word being said while nothing happens, which is precisely the lesson you did not want to teach.

13.6 Testing — Twice, and the Second One Matters

Test one is inside the routine cards above: interrupt for forty seconds, fire once, watch.

Test two is the one that tells you the truth, and almost nobody does it, because it is boring and it has to happen ten minutes later when the conversation has moved on and everybody is talking about someone's brother.

ROUTINE 13.4 — The Cold Test

What it is You fire the trigger out of nowhere, ten minutes later, inside an ordinary conversation, with no build-up at all.
How long 6 seconds.
What you need Nothing but the discipline to not look at her.
Prerequisite A trigger that passed its immediate test.

(Ten minutes minimum. She should be talking, eating, or doing something with her hands. No eye contact before, during or immediately after. No lowering of your voice. No leaning in. The whole point is the absence of ceremony.)

Say it exactly like this — and note that the trigger is buried mid-sentence, not delivered as an announcement:

> *— no, the thing is her brother does exactly the same,* **Marlow***, every single time, and nobody ever says anything —*

> *(Keep your own sentence going for two more words. Then let it trail. Count three seconds. Watch her hands.)*

What counts as a hit: a delay in whatever she was doing. A word she loses. Her volume dropping. Hands going still. A blink that arrives late. That is all. You are not looking for her to slump — a person who slumps in the middle of a conversation about somebody's brother is performing, and performance is a different chapter.

If it lands, do not celebrate it. Say one flat sentence and give it back to her:

> *That's it working. Nothing dramatic — it's not supposed to be dramatic.*

(Watch the hands, not the face. The face is polite. The hands are honest.)

If it doesn't come Absolutely nothing happens next. You do not repeat
it, you do not mention it, you do not look at her to check. Finish the sentence you started and let the evening carry on. An untested-looking failure is invisible; a failure you draw attention to becomes the story of the night. Rebuild later if there's a later, and if there isn't, you had a good hour with somebody and no debt.

13.7 The Honest Part: What Actually Survives

This is the section most likely to be cut by somebody rewriting this book for a workshop, and it is the section the whole chapter is built around.

Anchors are not permanent. They get weaker when nobody uses them and stronger when somebody does. That is the entire law of decay, and there is nothing underneath it.

(There is no seventy-two-hour window. Somebody made that number up a long time ago and everybody repeated it because a number sounds like knowledge. An anchor does not have a shelf life printed on it. It has a usage history.)

So: what realistically holds from Thursday night to Saturday morning?

A sound anchor tied to something the festival repeats — this holds. The song plays, the can opens, the group makes its noise. Each of those is a free rehearsal you did not have to be present for. This is the only channel that regularly makes it to Sunday in recognisable shape, and it is the reason the sound channel is worth the trouble of setting by proxy.

A word anchor that got fired two or three times in between — this holds, thinner. Thinner is normal. The second-day version is usually smaller and faster than the first: less depth, quicker arrival. That is not decay in the sense of damage. That is a familiar road being driven quickly.

A touch anchor, if you are physically around — this holds well and travels badly. It is excellent on Friday evening when you are both at the same fire, and it does nothing at all on Friday afternoon when you are at different stages.

Anything set once, at a mediocre peak, never tested and never used again — this is gone.

Usually by breakfast. Not faded: gone. There is no residue to be disappointed about.

My own tally, from a notebook and not from a study: of the anchors I have set on campsites over about nine seasons, roughly a third were still doing something recognisable two days later. Every single one of that third had been fired at least three times in between. The ones I set beautifully on Thursday and then admired from a distance were dead on Friday, without exception, and I spent three summers not understanding why.

Two more honest things, because they will otherwise get blamed on your technique:

It fades unevenly, and the unevenness is mostly biology. The same anchor that landed hard on Thursday at midnight will get you almost nothing on Saturday at noon after four hours of sleep, no food, and a hangover. Then it works again on Saturday evening after a burger and a nap. Sleep, food, water and blood sugar move the result more than anything in this chapter.

It can only bring back what was there. If Thursday's state was a pleasant, mild, slightly floaty ten minutes, then Saturday's firing returns a fraction of a pleasant, mild, slightly floaty ten minutes. There is no compound interest.

Which leaves one job: the top-up.

ROUTINE 13.5 — The Thirty-Second Top-Up

What it is A short, deliberately boring morning refresh: fire the trigger, hold what comes, set it once more on top.

How long 30 seconds. Not three minutes.
What you need Her, awake, and half a minute.
Prerequisite An anchor set the night before that passed a cold test.

(Do it in the first two hours after she is up. Before the first drink, before the first stage, before the day gets loud. Standing is fine. Both of you can be holding coffee. It should look like nothing.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *Give me thirty seconds and then I'll leave you alone.*
>
> *Stand where you are, hands wherever they are, eyes open or closed, doesn't matter.*
>
> **Marlow.**
>
> *(Stop. Count five. Do not fill the five with talking — the five is the whole routine.)*
>
> *And whatever came back with that — a lot of it or a little — just let it sit there for a second without tidying it up.*
>
> **Marlow.**
>
> *(Second firing, right on top of whatever is up. Then step back half a pace.)*
>
> *That's it. That's the whole thing. Go and get your breakfast.*

(Then genuinely leave. The top-up works because it is short and unglamorous and happens every morning. The moment you extend it into a session, it stops being a habit and becomes an event, and events don't

happen daily.)

If it doesn't come Fire it once, get nothing, and stop — do not stretch it into a rescue attempt in a food queue. Say: "Bit thin this morning. Everything's thin this morning." Then set it again properly that evening, on a fresh state, at a proper peak. A morning with nothing in it is a normal event and it predicts nothing about the evening.

13.8 The Ethics of a Three-Day Anchor

Short section. No hedging in it.

Nobody gets an anchor they don't know about. You say what you are about to do, you say what the trigger will be, and you say it before you set it, not after. "I'm going to attach this to a word, and the word is Marlow, and that means when you hear it, some of this may turn up again." That sentence takes four seconds and it is the difference between a game and something else.

No covert anchoring. Not as a joke. Not "she'll figure it out", not "it's funnier if she doesn't know", not "I'll tell her tomorrow". A trigger somebody cannot identify is a trigger they cannot refuse, and a person walking around a festival reacting to something they cannot name is not part of a game they agreed to. If that sounds heavy for what is essentially a card trick with a word: it is heavy, because it lasts three days and a card trick lasts a minute.

Thursday's yes is not Saturday's yes. Ask again on the second day. One sentence: "Still fine with the

word thing, or shall I take it off?" Consent for a multi-day anchor is a subscription, not a purchase.

Do not tie an anchor to anything she cannot get away from. Not her own name. Not her partner's voice. Not the sound of a tent zip, or an alarm, or a baby crying, or anything she will meet in her ordinary life next month when none of this is around to make sense of it. Everything you use should be something she can walk away from by walking away from this field.

Do not anchor a state she didn't enjoy. Obvious. Gets ignored anyway, usually because a startle or a wobble looked dramatic and dramatic looked useful.

Do not build an anchor whose point is that other people laugh at her later. The group can be in on it — that is fine and often good. The group being in on it while she is not is the thing this section exists to forbid.

And you take it off when she asks. No negotiation, no "give it a day", no "you'll miss it". Same evening if she wants it the same evening. If she texts you in six weeks, you answer with the removal script and you do not make her feel silly for asking. That obligation is part of the price of setting one, and if you are not willing to pay it, set nothing.

13.9 Taking It Off

(No, nothing gets erased. There is no erase. There is covering, and there is fading, and that is the entire toolbox.)

Anybody who tells her they will delete it is either lying or has never checked. What you can actually do is three things at once, and together they work well enough that in a fortnight there is nothing left worth noticing:

1. **Overwrite.** Fire the trigger in flat, bright, boring conditions where nothing follows it. Daylight. Ordinary conversation. She is eating. Each firing where nothing happens teaches the trigger a new, duller meaning, and duller meanings stack.

2. **Stop using it.** Silence does more of the work than anything you say. No firing, no mentioning, no jokes about it.

3. **Give her the last word on it out loud.** One spoken reframe, delivered once, which hands her the file rather than closing it behind her back.

ROUTINE 13.6 — Taking It Back

What it is A two-minute overwrite that turns the trigger back into an ordinary word, sound or touch, and hands her control of what's left.
How long 2 minutes, plus three flat firings spread over the day.
What you need Daylight if possible. No state, no induction, nothing
theatrical.
Prerequisite She asked. Or you are leaving on Sunday and you offered.

(Do this awake. Do not put her under to take an anchor off — that is the one move that reliably makes people feel it was never theirs to begin with.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *Right — the word. Let's take it apart.*

Here's the honest version first: I can't delete it, and nobody can. What we can do is make it ordinary again, which in practice ends up in the same place.

So: **Marlow**.

(Say it flatly. Normal volume. Keep your face doing nothing. Wait three seconds — and this time, if anything turns up, you deliberately let it go past without acknowledging it.)

Marlow. Marlow.

(Three times in a row, flat, quick, boring. Nothing follows any of them.)

That's a word again. That's all it was ever going to be — a word we agreed to use for a couple of days.

And from here on, nobody says it, including me. It'll thin out on its own the way things do when nothing keeps them going.

One last thing, and it matters: in a few weeks you might hear it somewhere and get a flicker of something. That's normal, that's not a leftover switch, and it fades. If it ever bothers you, tell me and we'll do this again.

(Then say the word three more times over the rest of the day, spread out, in genuinely dull contexts. Walking to the car. In a queue. Nothing after any of them.)

If it doesn't come Meaning: she fires it herself, gets a strong response, and looks alarmed that the "removal"

didn't remove. Do not repeat the routine harder — repetition under alarm makes it interesting, and interesting is the opposite of what you're building. Say: "That's the point where it's supposed to still turn up a bit. It goes down with weeks, not with minutes." Then leave it entirely alone for a fortnight, which is what actually does the work, and offer to run it once more after that if she wants.

When It Goes Wrong

The song comes on at eleven on Friday night while she is carrying a crate of bottles with both hands, arguing with her boyfriend, or on the phone to her mother.

Start with the realistic size of the problem, because the imagined version is the one that makes people handle it badly. What actually happens, nearly every time, is a two-second wobble. A lost sentence. A blink. She says "hang on, what was I saying". That is the shape of a misfire on a campsite: small, brief, and much more interesting to you than to her.

Name it immediately, flatly, out loud. The single fastest fix is to make it boring before anybody has a chance to make it a story.

> *That's the song. That's all that is.*

Six words, ordinary voice, then carry straight on with whatever was being discussed. Do not lower your voice for it. Do not look concerned. Do not say "interesting". A misfire treated as an event becomes an event.

Then hand her the controls, on the spot. Deliberate firing takes the strangeness out of a trigger faster than avoidance ever does — avoidance keeps it charged, use makes it ordinary.

> *Do it on purpose once. Hum the bit yourself, right now, and let whatever turns up turn up while you're standing here holding a crate. — Right. That's you doing it, not it doing you.*

If it fired while you weren't there and she tells you about it later, do not look delighted. Your face at that moment is the whole conversation. Ask one question and mean it: *did it bother you?* If the answer is yes, or if the answer is a long pause and then "no, it was fine" — you take it off tonight, using §13.9, and you do not spend three minutes arguing that it was actually a good sign.

If it fires when she has been drinking, do nothing with it. No top-up, no test, no "let's see if it still works". Say the flat sentence, change the subject, walk to the food stand. Alcohol was already a reason not to work with somebody; it is also a reason not to admire your own equipment while it goes off.

If somebody else says the word, remember what you built: the trigger belongs to the state, not to your voice. Anyone can say it. Anyone will, once they hear it. This is the argument for a word nobody says, and it is also the argument for telling the group what the word is when the group is present — a circle that knows the word is a circle that stops using it as a toy when you ask.

And the failure that outnumbers all the others put together: the group finds out the word works and fires it eleven times in five minutes because it is funny. It is funny. It is also two things at once — a trigger being taught to mean nothing, and a person being turned into equipment in front of her friends.

Stop it once, early, cheerfully, and without a lecture:

> *One each, then it's done. It stops working if you wear it out, and she's not a jukebox.*

Then take her out of the circle for ninety seconds, top the anchor up properly with Routine 13.5 if it is still worth having, and if it isn't, take it off tonight and tell her why. An anchor that has become the group's toy is finished either way. The only remaining decision is whether it finishes as a thing you removed or a thing she has to keep explaining.

Chapter 14 — Waking Up — Every Single Time

Half two in the morning. The woman in the borrowed rain jacket has her eyes closed and her chin down, and the circle around the fire has gone quiet in that particular way that means everybody is waiting for you to do the impressive thing.

You already did the impressive thing. What is left is the part nobody films.

Learn the return before you learn anything else in this book, and if you only ever get one thing right, get this one right. Not because something terrible happens otherwise — mostly it doesn't. Because a campsite at night is the worst place on earth to leave somebody standing at half attention. There are ropes at ankle height that you cannot see from two metres away. There is an open fire. There is a slope, a drainage ditch, a van with a ladder bolted to the back of it, and four thousand people who have all had a long day. Indoors, a person who is still half in it sits on a sofa and drifts. Out here, she walks.

So she gets brought all the way back. Out loud. Item by item. Every single time.

14.1 The Rule

You end what you started, completely, before she goes anywhere — and you do it whether or not anything visible happened.

The second half of that sentence is the whole chapter.

Here is the arithmetic. When it works dramatically — the arm locks, the name goes missing, the circle laughs — you will always bring her back, because the ending is part of the performance and your ego will not let you skip it. Your vanity does the safety work for you. That case is handled.

The dangerous case is the other one. She stood there for four minutes with her eyes shut, nothing moved, nobody gasped, and you felt the circle's attention slide off you and onto the guy with the guitar. So you say something like "yeah, it's not for everyone, no worries," you give her a friendly nod, and you turn away. Nobody brings her back — because nobody in the circle, including you, believes there is anything to bring her back from.

Two things are wrong with that.

The first is that *looked like nothing* and *was nothing* are different statements, and you have access to only one of them. The visible signs — the swaying, the lid flutter, the arm that stays where you put it — are things some people produce and other people don't. Plenty of people go very quiet instead of very obvious. You have no window into the inside of anybody's head; you have a face in bad firelight. Making a decision about her internal state from that face and then acting on it is guesswork dressed as judgement.

The second is simpler and worse: the suggestions you set are still sitting where you left them, regardless of whether they visibly fired. If you tied a word to a response and then walked off without untying it, you left knotted string on a dark field. Nothing dramatic will come of it. It is still sloppy, and sloppy is the only

thing that ever actually goes wrong in this hobby.

There is a third reason and it has nothing to do with safety. A person who has just "failed" in front of six friends and then gets abandoned by the operator has been handed a small, quiet humiliation. The full return is also the thing that gives her a dignified way out of the middle of the circle. She gets counted up, activated, thanked, and handed back to her people like everyone else. Nobody watching can tell the difference between a return after a big one and a return after a nothing. That is the point.

(Nobody was asleep. Nobody is ever asleep. "Waking up" is the wrong word for what you're doing, and you will use it anyway, because it is the word she has.)

One more timing rule, and it costs nothing to obey. Run the return **before the circle's attention moves on**. Once three people have started a different conversation, your ending has no room to land, you will rush it, and she will get her eyes open with half a list still in your pocket. If somebody starts talking over you, hold up one hand and say, flat and unbothered: *"Thirty seconds, then she's all yours."* Nobody has ever argued with that.

14.2 The Standard Return

Read the wording once with the mechanics of this book in your head and you will notice that it does the opposite of everything in Chapter 2. Going in, you work with gaps — unnamed actors, missing yardsticks, *some part of you*, *more than you expected*. The gaps are the engine. She fills them with her own material and her own material meets no resistance.

Coming out, you close every gap you opened. No *some part of you*. No comparatives without a reference. No permission-shaped vagueness about how much comes back. **Everything you built with gaps, you take back without gaps.** A vague ending is not a gentle ending; it is an ending with a slot in it, and a slot is exactly the thing she is trained by now to fill.

Two delivery rules before the wording.

Count up, not down. You went in on numbers going down. If you come out on numbers going down as well, you are teaching her, in the same evening, that your counting means the same thing in both directions — and you will be fighting your own anchor at eleven the next night. Up. One to five. One number per breath, roughly eight seconds for the whole thing, not thirty.

Ramp the voice across the count. At *one* you are still speaking at the pace you induced with. By *four* you are at your normal talking volume and speed. At *five* you sound like a man at a campsite talking to somebody about their tent. If you are still doing the slow warm voice at *five*, you have just told her the game is still running, and no amount of "you're wide awake" will contradict what your own delivery is doing.

This is not the show voice. Firm and loud are not the same thing. If you ran the routine in the show register, keep that delivery — short, level, on the beat — but the list you hand back is word for word the same list. The register changes. The inventory never does.

ROUTINE 14.2 — The Standard Return

What it is The full close-down: give-back, count, orientation, activation.

Run after every single routine, including the ones that looked like nothing.
How long 70 to 90 seconds
What you need Both your hands free. Your list. A patch of level ground behind
her, away from the fire.
Prerequisite None. This is never optional and never abbreviated.

Step 1 — Close the frame. Eyes still shut. Change nothing about your voice yet.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good. That's the end of the game.*
>
> *Nothing left to do now, nothing to hold on to. I'm going to hand a few things back to you, and then we're finished."*

(Say "the end of the game" flat. Not warm, not solemn. The word "end" is doing the work; do not decorate it.)

Step 2 — The named give-back. One sentence per item. By name and by number, in the order you set them.

Before the wording, the distinction most people never make: the two kinds of item do not come back the same way, and a list that treats them the same is half wrong twice.

A block or an amnesia you can genuinely close. 10.1, the glued hand, took the lift out of her hand. 10.11, the forgotten number four, took four's slot out of her count. Both of those go back complete, on the spot, stated as finished fact — and then you have her use the thing once, out loud or with the hand, while you watch.

A give-back she performs is worth three she only hears.

An anchor you cannot close, and you do not pretend otherwise. The word from 13.1, the four-second shoulder from 13.2, the borrowed noise from 13.3 — those thin out. They do not switch off, there is no switch, and Chapter 13 spends a whole section on why. So the anchor line does a different job: fire it once, flat, with nothing behind it, then tell her exactly what is left and roughly how long it takes. Promise her a deletion here and the first time that word turns up on Saturday afternoon, you are the bloke who was wrong about the thing he sounded most certain about.

Say it exactly like this — this is the version for an evening that ran 10.1, then 10.11, then the word from 13.1. Swap in your own items and keep the shapes:

> *"The hand on the table. That's finished — your hand is your hand, all the way to the fingertips, and nothing I said about that table is still attached to it. Lift it for me. Put it down again. Yours.*
>
> *Four. Back in the line between three and five, and it stays there — tonight, and every time you count anything after tonight. Give me one to five out loud. Good. Full set.*
>
> *Marlow. (Flat. Ordinary volume. Three seconds of nothing behind it, and whatever turns up, you let it go past unacknowledged.) That's a word again. Nobody says it after tonight, me included, and it goes quiet on its own the way things do when nothing feeds them. If it's still doing something to you at the weekend, come and find me and we'll*

take it apart properly."

(Plain sentences. Short. No music in the voice. This is the one place in the entire book where you speak like a man reading out a receipt, and that is deliberate.)

Two more you will be handing back constantly, because they are the two most often left off the list — 10.2 and 10.8:

"Your name. The bit that fetches it is back on duty and it stays on duty. Say it to me once. Good. Last time I ask.

Paprika. (Beat.) Paprika. Red powder, on a shelf, deeply boring, and the hook is off it."

Yes, you already took the laugh trigger off at the end of 10.8 and tested it there. Name it again here anyway. It costs four seconds, and the night you skip it will be the night you were wrong about having done it.

Never do this as a blanket. *"Everything I said is cancelled now"* sounds thorough and is worth almost nothing: it names nothing, so there is nothing for her to close, and a person who has spent ten minutes filling in blanks will do exactly that with a sentence that broad. Name each item. Say the actual word. Say the actual number.

Which means you have to remember them, which means you have to track them while you set them. Two ways that work on a field: count them off on the fingers of your left hand as you set them, or say each one out loud twice when you install it. If you have set more than four things in one sitting, you are running too much on one person anyway.

Step 3 — Hand back the steering.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Everything I handed to your hand goes back to you. You're the one running it. You always were — you just let somebody else hold the map for ten minutes."*

(This is true, so say it like it's true. Not as reassurance. As information.)

Step 4 — The count, with the place built into it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"One — sounds coming back up. The bass from over there. People talking behind you.*
>
> *Two — the ground under both feet. Cold on the backs of your hands.*
>
> *Three — fire on your left, tents behind you, your lot standing right here. It's about half two in the morning, we're on the field by the second gate.*
>
> *Four — shoulders. Neck. A breath deeper than the last one.*
>
> *Five — eyes open."*

(Name the actual time, the actual place, the actual landmark. Not "you're at a festival." Where the two of you are standing, in words she can check by looking.)

Step 5 — The activation. She has her eyes open. She is not done.

Say it exactly like this, and do it while you say it:

"Give me your hands — squeeze. Hard as you like. Good.

Push both feet into the ground like you're leaving a mark in it. Good.

Roll your shoulders back once.

Now shake your hands out — six or seven seconds, like you're getting water off them."

(Announce your hands before you offer them: "Give me your hands" and then wait for her to move first. Palms up, at her waist height, no grab. If she doesn't take them, hold out one finger for her to squeeze instead and carry on as though that was the plan.)

Step 6 — The last sentence. A statement. Not a question.

Say it exactly like this:

"That's it. We're done. You're standing on a field at half two in the morning and the rest of the night is out here."

If it doesn't come Her eyes open at "three" and she looks straight at you,
grinning, halfway through the list. Do not restart, do not shush her, do not go back down. Drop the slow voice instantly, keep going in your normal talking voice, and finish the list out loud anyway — including the items she already looks finished with. Then do the activation. The count is packaging. The give-back is the parcel.

Why the last sentence is never a question

"Are you all the way back?" "How does that feel?" "Everything back to normal?" All three are decent questions and all three are ruinous as the *final* sentence of a return, for three reasons.

A question sends her inward. To answer "am I all the way back," she has to stop, close down her attention, and go check — which is the precise inward motion you just spent ninety seconds reversing. You are asking her to do a small induction as the last thing she hears.

A question puts the bad option on the table. "Are you all the way back?" presupposes that *not all the way back* is a live possibility here and now, and that it is hers to report on. Some people will take that offer, not out of malice, but because you have just spent ten minutes teaching them that interesting things are found by looking inside and reporting what turns up.

And a question makes your ending conditional on her answer. If she says "hmm, I don't know," you now have nothing to stand on. You either repeat the whole thing — which tells the circle you think something is wrong — or you say "ah, you're fine" and contradict your own question.

A statement closes the file. It also picks a target you can actually hit: notice that the closing line makes a claim about *the world* — a field, a time, an outside — and no claim at all about the inside of her head. Facts about the world do not need checking. Claims about her insides do, and checking is the wrong direction.

You still want her report. You get it thirty seconds later, in the buffer, as conversation. Different moment,

different job. The rule is narrow and absolute: **no question is the last sentence of the return.** After the return, ask whatever you like.

14.3 The Full-Wake Buffer

Between "eyes open" and "off you go" there is a gap, and the gap is not politeness. It is technique, it takes about two minutes, and skipping it is the single most common mistake made by people who are otherwise careful.

The reason is coming-back is not an event, it is a slope. The eyes open early on that slope. Speech comes back next. Balance and the ability to do two things at once come back last, and those two are exactly what she needs to cross forty metres of guy lines in the dark.

So you keep her, and you keep her without making it obvious that you are keeping her, because "stay here a minute, I need to check you're okay" plants a worry that wasn't there. You keep her by talking to her.

ROUTINE 14.3 — The Two-Minute Buffer

What it is Two minutes of ordinary conversation that double as a function test. She experiences small talk. You are reading balance, speech tempo, and dual tasking.
How long Two minutes. Time it the first ten times you do it; people
consistently overestimate by half.
What you need Something for her to hold that needs grip — a cup, her own
jacket, a bottle. Nothing alcoholic.
Prerequisite Routine 14.2 completed, including the activation.

Do not stand over her. Sit on the bench beside her, or crouch, or lean on the same table. Vertical distance

reads as authority, and authority is what you are handing back.

The test has two halves and you run them at the same time, which is the whole trick.

Half one — a memory task with a spatial answer.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Right — where's your tent? Point at it."*

You are not making conversation. You want a direction, a landmark, and a rough distance, produced without a long pause. "Over there somewhere" is not a pass. "Behind the blue van, past the second row, five minutes" is a pass.

Half two — a motor task, run underneath the memory task. While she is answering, she stands up. Not because you told her to stand up — because you stood up first and started walking two steps toward the fire's edge, and people follow.

What you are watching for is one thing: **does she put a hand down?** A palm on the bench, a grab at the table edge, a hand on a friend's arm. Somebody who is all the way back stands up out of a camping chair without any of that, while talking, and does not think about it.

Three more reads, none of them dramatic:

• **Speech tempo.** Compare it to how she talked before you started. Half a second of lag on every answer is worth another minute of buffer. You know her baseline because you spoke to her for two minutes before you began — that conversation was also a measurement,

which is one of several reasons it exists.

• **Eyes.** Not the size of anything. Whether they move. A person who is back scans the circle, checks who is watching, finds her friend. A person who is still coming back looks at you and only at you.

• **Volunteered speech.** Answers-only is normal for about thirty seconds. When she asks *you* something unprompted, she is back in the room.

And one instruction you give out loud, because it is the most useful sentence in this entire section:

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Do me a favour and don't go anywhere for a couple of minutes — I want to hear what that was like from your side."*

(This is true, and it is also the buffer. You are not detaining her; you are asking for something you actually want.)

If it doesn't come She can't place the tent, or she braces on the bench
standing up. Nothing dramatic, nothing announced. Sit her back down, put something non-alcoholic in her hand, and run 14.2's activation a second time — seated, all four parts, nothing skipped. The one difference is what the squeeze is for. First time round it was a wake-up. This time it is a reading: compare the grip to the one she gave you ninety seconds ago, and if it is softer, she is further back down the slope than she looks. Then keep talking for three more minutes about anything at all and test again. If it's still not there after two rounds, she does not walk anywhere on her own: her friend sits with her, and you stay put until somebody else is holding it.

(This is not medicine and you are not bringing anybody back from anywhere. It is the same care you would take with a friend who stood up too fast — done deliberately, because you were the reason she sat down.)

14.4 What The Ground Does At Night

Every book on this subject was written for a room. Rooms are flat, lit, dry, warm, and have a chair in them. You have none of that. Walk the list before your first evening, not after — and walk it in her order, from the second she stands up to the second she has a hand on her own tent. That is the route, and every item below sits on it where she will meet it.

Before she stands up at all: nobody drives, nobody rides. Not a car, not a van, not a bike, not a scooter, not a quad from the crew tent. If she has any reason at all to be behind a wheel or on two wheels tonight, you do not run a routine on her. This one is settled before she ever sits down — ask first, it is one sentence, and it belongs in the same breath as the sobriety check.

She stands up: the fire. Never bring somebody up out of a routine facing the fire. Sort this at the start, not at the end: place her so the fire is at your back and to her side, so that the first two steps she takes when she stands are steps *away* from it. Nobody has walked into a fire because of hypnosis. People have walked into fires because they stood up in the dark, turned to find their friends, and the fire was where the turn ended. Also: nothing that burns is in her hands during the return. Not a cigarette, not a cup of something hot, not

a sparkler somebody handed her mid-routine because they thought it was funny.

Her first two steps: the ground itself. Ruts from the tractor, tent pegs at shin height, cables under mats, molehills, the pallet somebody laid down over the mud, the slope everybody forgets is a slope until they walk it in the dark.

The forty metres after that: guy lines. The great invisible hazard of every campsite. Ankle height, dark nylon, invisible past two metres, and there are hundreds of them. This is the single most likely way anybody actually gets hurt on your evening, and it is why the buffer exists at all.

Where the camps meet: barriers and fences. Crowd barriers have feet that stick out at ankle level, and their corners are at exactly the height that catches a hip. And nobody stands on the far side of a fence from their friends: if she came over to your fire from another camp, she does not cross back over a barrier or a ditch on her own in the dark. Somebody goes with her and comes back.

The dark stretches with water in them. Rivers, lakes, drainage ditches, the mud around the standpipes, the ditch that runs along the back of every camping field. Anywhere with water and darkness, the answer is not "be careful", the answer is she doesn't go there tonight until somebody sober is next to her.

At her own tent: ladders. Roof tents, awnings, the ladder bolted to the back of every second van. Nobody climbs anything for the next half hour. If she was sitting on a roof or a van when you started, that is the

mistake, not the ending — do not run a routine on anybody who is more than a step off the ground.

And she does none of that route alone. Not "nobody who seems wobbly" — nobody. She came to your fire with somebody; that somebody walks her back. Do it by name, out loud, so it actually happens:

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Jonas — you're taking her back to the tent, yeah? Cheers."*

(Name the person. Vague appeals to "someone" produce nobody. Say the name and wait for the nod.)

None of this is nervousness. It is the reason you get to do this at a festival at all: you hand a person back to a person, not back to the night.

14.5 When The Eyes Stay Shut

The classic small horror of this hobby. You said "eyes open," she didn't, and eight people are watching you find out what you're made of.

Almost always it is one of three boring things. She is comfortable and there is no incentive to end it — it is warm, quiet, nothing is being asked of her, and out here that is a rare condition. Or your instruction got lost: you said "eyes open" at the exact moment the bass dropped from the next field, and she is genuinely waiting for the next thing. Or she is having a slightly better time than the truth warrants, in front of people she knows, and she is curious whether you will panic.

(She cannot get stuck. There is no stuck. There is a person who is comfortable and in no hurry, which

looks identical from two metres away and is not the same thing at all.)

What you do not do: raise your voice, touch her face, shake her, snap fingers next to her ear, or say the word "stuck" out loud. And whatever the circle does, you do not let it become a contest — the moment somebody says "ha, she's stuck," you have a spectator with a stake in her staying put.

ROUTINE 14.5 — The Long Runway

What it is A second, slower exit for the person whose eyes stayed shut.
More runway, one clear job, and a floor under it.
How long 40 seconds, plus up to two minutes of leaving her alone.
What you need Your normal voice. Patience you may have to fake.
Prerequisite Routine 14.2 already run once in full.

Step back to arm's length so you are not looming, and drop your volume rather than raising it.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"There's no rush on this. Take the time you want — the game's over either way, that part's done.*
>
> *Here's the only job left. On three, your eyes come open. Not before. Three seconds from now, and you can spend them however you like.*
>
> *One — you can already hear how loud it is out here.*
>
> *Two — hands, feet, the cold on your face.*
>
> *Three. Eyes open, and we're finished."*

(Three seconds. Count them properly — most people rush "one two three" into a second and a half and then

wonder why nothing happened.)

If that does not do it, remove the audience and the pressure at once, out loud, so the circle hears the frame you are setting:

Say it exactly like this:

> *"All good. Nothing happening for the next two minutes — I'm sitting down right here.*
>
> *Whether they come open now or in a minute when you've had enough of sitting still, either way it's over and I'm not going anywhere."*

Then actually sit down. Talk to somebody else. Stay within arm's reach and stop paying attention to her.

If it doesn't come She's still sitting there after the two minutes. Then
you wait, because that is the entire remedy. Nobody stays: it gets cold, it gets boring, the bladder has opinions. Every minute or so, one plain sentence in your normal voice — "still here, take your time" — and nothing else. No new script, no new count, no theatre. And when she does open them, say nothing about it having taken a while. Straight into the buffer as if it were the most ordinary ending of the evening, because it is.

14.6 When She Cries

Take it completely seriously and get her out immediately. That is the whole policy, and everything below is just the wording.

Nothing you did caused this, and that is not the useful frame anyway. People cry at festivals at two in the morning for reasons that have been queuing up for

months — tiredness, a phone call from Tuesday, the first ten quiet minutes she has had all week. Quiet plus a person paying attention to you is a combination that opens things. It does not mean anything went wrong, and it is also not your material to work with.

(Tears are not damage. They are also not an invitation.)

You do not interpret. You do not ask what came up. You do not ask whether it is about someone. You do not offer to "clear it", "go back in and sort it", or "finish what started". Every one of those sentences is somebody else's job, from a different book, done sober, in a room, with training you do not have and are not getting tonight.

ROUTINE 14.6 — The Quiet Stop

What it is Immediate return for somebody who has started crying, with
no reference to the content.
How long 60 seconds, then hand over.
What you need Her friend's name. Something to drink.
Somewhere with less
light and fewer people, three metres away.
Prerequisite None. This overrides whatever you were in the middle of.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Okay — we're stopping here. That's fine, and there's nothing you need to explain to me.*
>
> *The heavy arm goes back to you now. The word we used is finished, it's just a word. Everything I set up, I'm taking back — all of it, done.*

Eyes open when you want them open. Feet on the ground. It's half two, we're by the fire, and I'm right here.

You can take a breath and take your time. Nobody's watching this, and nobody has to hear about it."

(Say the give-back list anyway. All of it. This is exactly the moment it gets skipped and exactly the moment it matters most.)

Then, and this order matters: turn your body to block the circle's sight line, and get her person.

Say it exactly like this, to the friend, quietly, by name:

"Leah — come here a second. She's alright, she's just had enough. Sit with her."

Who you bring in: the friend she arrived with. One person, not the group. If she came alone at night — you never started, because that is in the gate and the gate is not negotiable.

Who you do not bring in: the circle, the loudest helper, the bloke who "does breathwork", anybody with a phone in his hand.

What you do afterwards, which is the part people get wrong:

• You do not tell the story at the fire. Not tonight, not tomorrow, not as an anecdote about how deep she went.

• You do not ask her later what came up. Not in the queue for coffee, not "if she wants to talk about it". You have made yourself available by being ordinary with

her. Leave the door on her side.

• You do not run anything else with her this weekend. Not a small one, not "something nice to finish on".

• You do not decide what it was. You have no idea. Neither does anyone else standing on that field.

If it doesn't come She doesn't settle after a few minutes, or she can't
get her breath, or her friend looks out of her depth.
Then it stops being a hobby question. Every festival
has a medical or welfare tent, it is staffed, it is
free, and walking somebody over is not a scandal —
it is a five-minute walk and the most normal thing
that happens there all night. Go with them, hand over
in plain language — "she got upset, she's been up
since six, she's not on anything" — and then step
back out of it.

14.7 When The Laughing Won't Stop

Less alarming, more annoying, and it happens more often than crying by a factor of about ten.

Laughter is contagious, self-feeding, and it has an audience — which means three engines are running and only one of them is inside her. The circle laughs because she laughs, she laughs harder because the circle did, and now she is at a performance she cannot get out of without letting somebody down. Add tiredness and it can run for minutes.

It is not a problem in itself. It becomes one when she can't get air, or when she is clearly working to keep it going for the crowd, or when the joke has quietly become *her*.

The instinct is to go firmer and louder. That fails, twice: louder feeds the show, and "stop laughing" is a command she can fail at, which is funny, which produces more laughing.

ROUTINE 14.7 — Taking The Room Away

What it is Ends runaway laughter by removing the audience and the
rhythm rather than by pushing against it.
How long 30 to 60 seconds
What you need Your body as a screen. A slower breath than hers.
Prerequisite None.

Do these in order, and do them physically before you say anything.

Take the audience. Step so you are standing between her and most of the circle, at forty-five degrees, close enough that her natural eyeline lands on your shoulder rather than on her friends. Half the fuel is sight lines.

Go quieter, not louder. Drop your volume below the level of the circle. People match. They cannot help it.

Give her body a job that competes with laughing. You cannot laugh hard through a long slow out-breath. That is mechanical, not psychological.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Yeah, that one gets people. Have a laugh, it's allowed.*
>
> *Breathe out with me, though — long one, right to the end of it. (Do it audibly yourself, four seconds out.) Good, and again.*

Now squeeze my hand — hard. Harder than that. Good.

Feet flat, both of them. That's it. Shoulders down."

(Match her rhythm for the first two seconds, then slow yours. Do not ask her to stop and do not name the laughing as a problem. "It's allowed" removes the thing she'd otherwise be pushing against.)

Then, as soon as the breath changes, straight into a plain sentence with real information in it — no more suggestion, no more script:

"Right, that's the lot. We're done. Come and sit down, you've been standing for ten minutes."

If it doesn't come Still going after the third out-breath. Break the scene properly: announce a hand on her shoulder, walk five steps out of the circle with her, and ask a boring question that requires a genuine answer — "which one's your friend, the one in the yellow jacket, what's she called?" Laughter needs an audience and a rhythm. Walking removes the rhythm, five steps removes the audience, and a question with a real answer removes the stage. Then run the buffer as normal.

14.8 When She's Actually Asleep

It is half two, she has been on her feet for fourteen hours, she has eaten one pretzel since noon, and you have just spent six minutes talking to her in a low, slow, warm voice while she sat still with her eyes shut. Occasionally the obvious thing happens.

Telling the difference is easier than people make out, and it comes down to one word: **responsiveness.**

In a routine, she is still tracking you. Small things answer — a finger moves when you mention the hand, a swallow lands where your sentence lands, the eyelids do that flicker, and when you change your pace her breathing changes with it a few seconds later. That last one is the most reliable read on a dark field: talk faster for fifteen seconds and watch whether her breathing follows you.

Asleep, none of that happens. The breathing goes deep and regular and completely ignores you. The head gets properly heavy — chin all the way onto the chest or lolling to one side, not the light drop of a routine. The jaw goes slack. Sometimes there is a snore, which settles the question.

ROUTINE 14.8 — The Ordinary Wake-Up

What it is Getting somebody who has genuinely fallen asleep back on
their feet, then closing the routine anyway.
How long 90 seconds
What you need Her name. One announced touch on the shoulder.
Prerequisite You have run the responsiveness check above.

Check first, in this order, and stop as soon as you get a response.

One: talk faster for fifteen seconds and watch the breathing. **Two:** say her name once, at your normal talking volume — not loud, not sharp. **Three:** announce and then use one hand on her shoulder. *"I'm going to put a hand on your shoulder."* Then do it. Two seconds of steady pressure, no shaking.

When she comes round, she will be foggy in the ordinary way anybody is foggy when woken at half two, and she may be embarrassed. Take that off her

immediately.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You dropped off — happens to about one in ten out here, honestly, it's the fire and the fourteen hours.*
>
> *Same as always though, so we do this properly: the heavy arm goes back to you, the word we used is finished and it's just a word again, and everything I set up is taken back.*
>
> *Ground under your feet, fire on your left, tents behind you, it's about half two. Now the same four things we always finish on — and slow, no rush on any of them.*
>
> *That's us done. You're going to bed."*

(Run 14.2's activation exactly as written, with one change: double every part of it. Fifteen seconds of shaking the hands out, not six. And she stays sitting for all of it — she stands up after the activation, not during. What you are working against here is not your own routine, it is ordinary sleep inertia, and that clears on its own schedule in minutes rather than seconds, whatever you say to it.)

(Run the give-back list even though you are fairly sure she was asleep for it. You do not know when she went, and neither does she. This costs twenty seconds and removes the entire question.)

Then: buffer as normal, and she does nothing else tonight. She is not a difficult subject and she is not a great one — she is tired. Somebody walks her to her

tent, and it is a genuinely good outcome as evenings go. It is also the least interesting thing that will happen at that fire all night, which is why it almost never gets written down.

If it doesn't come Faster talking, her name at normal volume, then her
name louder, then an announced hand on the shoulder —
and nothing at all comes back. Then this is not
hypnosis and it is not sleep, and it is not yours to
solve with more script. Stop talking to her entirely.
Get her friend, get the medical tent, and be exact
about what you know and what you don't: when she last
responded, how long she's been like this, and — this
one honestly — whether anything was drunk or taken
that you're aware of. Do not run another word of
anything at her while you wait.

14.9 Something That Looks Like A Memory

Short section, hard rule.

Sometimes, in the middle of an imagination game, something surfaces that has the shape of a memory. A house, a person, a smell, a year. She may say so out loud, and it may land on the circle like a revelation.

It is framed as imagination. Never as fact. And the game is over at that point.

The reason is not squeamishness. It is that you have no way to tell the difference and neither does she — material produced in a warm, permissive, half-lit frame comes out vivid, and vivid feels remembered. Then it gets a name, and a name given at two in the morning by a bloke at a campfire can outlive the festival by years. You do not get to hand somebody a

fact about their own past. Nobody at that fire does.

ROUTINE 14.9 — Handing It Back As Hers

What it is One sentence that frames surfaced material as imagination and
ends the routine without making it a moment.
How long 20 seconds, then straight into 14.2.
What you need Nothing. Do not sit down. Do not lower your voice.
Prerequisite None. This overrides everything in progress.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That's your imagination making something up on the spot — that's what it does when it's got room, and it's good at it.*
>
> *It's yours, it's not mine, and it's not evidence of anything.*
>
> *We're stopping there, though — that's not a game I play."*

(Normal voice. Do not go softer, and do not look interested. Interest is the invitation.)

Then run the full return, 14.2, immediately, including the give-back list. Then the buffer.

What you do not do, ever: ask what it was. Ask whether it really happened. Offer to go back in. Say "that explains a lot." Or tell it as a story at the fire afterwards.

If it doesn't come She insists it was real, and the circle wants more.
Do not argue with her and do not agree. "Maybe. I've got no way of knowing, and neither has anybody standing at a fire at two in the morning. What I know is we're stopping here." Then the return, then the buffer, then her friend. If the circle keeps pushing,

change the subject out loud and mean it: the fastest way to end a conversation at a campfire is to start a different one.

14.10 The Two Minutes After

She is standing, she has her jacket, she knows where the tent is, and the circle has already gone back to arguing about who is getting up for the first act. This is where almost everybody hands over a nod and turns to the next volunteer.

Don't. This is the part she will describe to people on the train home.

Not the arm. Not the trick with the number. The two minutes afterwards where somebody who had just done something odd to her turned out to be a normal person who wanted to know what it had been like.

ROUTINE 14.10 — The Two Minutes After

What it is A short conversation in which you ask one question and then
stop talking. Doubles as the end of the buffer.
How long Two minutes. Sometimes ten, if she wants ten.
What you need Your mouth shut for most of it.
Prerequisite The return is finished. The frame is already closed.

Sit down, or lean on the same thing she is leaning on. Ask one open question, and only one.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"So what was that actually like from your side?"*

Then stop. Count three seconds of silence before you say anything else — most people need those three seconds to find the first word, and most operators fill

them.

Four things you do not do while she answers.

Do not correct her account. If she says "I could have opened my eyes the whole time, I just didn't want to," she is right, and that is the correct description. Do not upgrade it into something more impressive for the benefit of the people listening.

Do not explain the mechanics unless she asks. If she asks, answer plainly and briefly — expectation, attention, a bit of theatre, and her own imagination doing the work. It costs you nothing and it is true. If she does not ask, she is not interested, and explaining it anyway is you performing again.

Do not sell the next one. "You're really good at this, you should try —" is the sentence that turns a person into a resource. If she wants another one, she will ask, tonight or on Saturday.

Do not ask how you did. Not "was that good?", not "have you seen that before?" She has just handed you the only honest feedback you will ever get in this hobby, and it is worth more than the applause from the circle, which is about the fire and the beer and the hour, not about you.

Then hand her over properly, by name, and let her go.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Right — Leah's waiting. Thanks for standing there, most people won't. See you tomorrow."*

(One line. Do not linger. The ending being unremarkable is what makes the whole thing sit well afterwards.)

If it doesn't come She shrugs and says "yeah, I don't think it worked."
Do not argue and do not persuade — arguing with somebody's account of their own head is the fastest way to make an enemy at a campfire. "Fair enough, happens plenty. Thanks for standing there anyway." Then hand her to her friend exactly as you would have done. Roughly a third of the time she comes back an hour later and tells you the bit she left out, because you did not make her defend the first version.

Two more things about those two minutes, and then this chapter is finished.

The first is practical. What she tells you here is your only real data. The circle's reaction tells you about the circle. Her sentence — "the arm bit was nothing but I properly could not find the number, that was strange" — tells you which of your routines actually did something and which one you have been running for four festivals because it looks good from the outside. Listen to twenty of those and you will quietly rebuild your whole set, and none of it will come from a book, including this one.

The second is not practical. She has spent ten minutes doing something faintly ridiculous in front of people whose opinion she cares about, on your say-so. Two minutes of somebody sitting down and asking what it was like is the whole price of that, and it is a cheap price.

So you sit there and you listen, and then she walks back into her group and you can already hear the story changing shape as she tells it — the arm is heavier, the pause is longer, you said something you definitely did not say. Let it. That version is hers now.

Then sit down and do nothing for a bit. The next one can wait ten minutes. So can you.

Chapter 15 — When It Goes Wrong

She opens her eyes on the count of three, looks straight at me, and says: "Sorry. I don't think it worked."

Eleven people are sitting around the fire. Her friend has been filming for forty seconds. The generator behind the food stall is loud enough that maybe half of them didn't hear what she said, which means half of them are about to ask her what she said, and she is about to answer them, and whatever she answers is going to be the version everyone remembers.

I have about three seconds. So do you.

That is what this chapter is for. Not for reading through in one sitting with a coffee — for looking up at one in the morning with cold hands. Nine situations. Every one of them has happened to me, most of them more than once, two of them on the same night. Each section has the same four beats: what you see, what is actually going on underneath it, what you do in the first seconds, and the wording.

Read the section you need. Don't read the chapter.

One structural note before the first one. Some of the wording here belongs to the single register — quiet, permissive, you standing next to someone rather than over them. Some of it belongs to the circle: shorter, flatter, carried by the group. Where both exist I have written both, separately, and marked which is which. Never run them into each other in one breath. A repair that switches register halfway sounds like a lie, and

people hear it before they can say why.

15.1 Nothing Happens

What you see. Her hands stay exactly where you put them. Or the arm bends when you said it might not. Or she opens her eyes early, shrugs, and apologises to you — which is the worst version, because now she is managing your feelings.

What is actually going on. This is the normal case. Out of ten people who say yes to me and get past the gate in Chapter 3, one does everything at once and does it deeply, three do something the person sitting next to them can see, four do something so small that only they notice it, and two do nothing at all tonight. That is the arithmetic of a field at midnight, and it does not improve much with experience. What improves with experience is what you do in the next three seconds.

There are also boring reasons, and they are usually the real ones: you rushed the setup, it is loud, she is cold, her friend is filming, she has been standing for nine hours, or she agreed out of politeness and never actually wanted this. None of those are her failing and none of them are yours. *(No, you did not lose her. She was never held.)*

What you do. You take ownership of the ending before she does. The first word after the attempt has to be yours, it has to be neutral, and it has to arrive fast. And then the exit belongs to her — she leaves with something, not with an explanation of what went

wrong. You never analyse a volunteer out loud. You never say "you're a difficult one". You never say "let's try that again" as a statement. If there is a second attempt at all, she asks for it.

ROUTINE 15.1 — The Clean Exit

What it is A three-sentence close for a test that produced nothing, which leaves the volunteer looking good and you unbothered.
How long Twelve seconds
What you need Nothing. Your own timing.
Prerequisite None. This is the routine you will use most often.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good — open your eyes. (Say "good" before she can say anything. Not as praise. As a full stop.) That's the common one out here. Hands do very little the first time a stranger asks them to do anything, and that says something about the noise and nothing about you. (Beat. Two seconds. Then change your body — turn forty-five degrees, look at the fire, take the pressure off her face.) Thanks for standing still with someone you don't know for forty seconds. Most people can't."*

Then you move. Not to another volunteer immediately — that reads as shopping. Pick up your cup, say something about the queue at the water point, let eight or nine seconds of ordinary conversation happen. The evening keeps its shape, and about a third of the time she comes back to you an hour later and asks to try the other one.

If it doesn't come If the exit doesn't take — she keeps apologising, or the group starts pushing her to "do it properly" — you take the failure off her by putting it on the conditions, out loud, once, and then you end the topic

by starting a different one.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"You're not the one who has to be sorry — I picked the loudest spot on the campsite. (To the group, flat, no smile:) That one needs quiet, so it's my fault, not hers. (Immediately, to anyone else:) Right — who here can't whistle?"*

If she asks for a second go, you say yes once, you change the technique, and you never run a third. Three attempts on one person in one night stops being an experiment and starts being pressure, and she will feel that even if nobody says it.

15.2 She Is Playing Along

What you see. The response is too fast. It is also too big. The arm doesn't drift up, it rises like a barrier at a car park. The eyes flick to the crowd at the exact moment the effect is supposed to land. She laughs half a beat before the funny part. And when you say "your hand is stuck", it is stuck instantly, completely, and theatrically.

What is actually going on. Two things you can actually use. First: latency. Something that is happening on its own is slower to answer than something being performed on purpose — half a second to a second slower, and often much more. A performed response has no lag, because the decision has already been made. Second: scale. Performance is large, because it has to be visible from the back. What

isn't performed is usually small enough that you have to look for it.

Neither of these gives you certainty. *(There is no meter. There has never been a meter.)* You are reading probability off a person in the dark, and you will be wrong sometimes in both directions.

Now the part that most books get wrong. On a campsite, playing along is often completely fine. She came to a field to have a good night with her friends. If she has decided to be in the show, she is in the show, and the group is having exactly the experience they came for. You do not need to expose her. Exposing her is the single most pointless thing you can do out here, and it kills the fire circle for the rest of the night.

What you need is not proof. What you need is to **know**, because knowing changes three things:

1. You do not go deeper. Depth work on someone who is being polite produces nothing except a longer stretch of politeness, and the longer it runs, the harder it is for her to stop without looking like a liar.

2. You do not build anchors on it. An anchor set on a performance is a favour you are asking her to remember on Saturday, and she will resent it by Friday.

3. You wake her differently — shorter, no depth language, and with a clean ending that lets her out without ever admitting anything.

When playing along is a real problem. When she is doing it because the group is watching and she has decided that stopping would be worse than continuing.

That version looks the same from outside and is completely different inside: she is now trapped in a bit she can't end. You will usually spot it in the mouth — the smile stays, the eyes stop joining in. When you see that, you end the sequence early and you give her the exit privately, not in front of the fire.

ROUTINE 15.2 — The Small Probe

What it is A test with no obvious correct performance, so the answer
tells you which of the two you have in front of you.
How long 25 seconds
What you need Both her hands resting somewhere. A bench, her knees, a rail.
Prerequisite Any opener already run. This is a diagnostic, not a start.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Leave both hands right where they are. (Single register. Quiet. You are next to her, not in front of her.) They're both resting, and they're both doing about the same amount of nothing — that's fine, that's what hands do. And as they rest there, one of them might be a shade warmer than the other. Or a shade heavier. You don't have to decide which, and you don't have to be right. (Pause. Four seconds. Do not fill it.) When you notice, the index finger of that hand can lift a millimetre or two. Not more than that. (Delegate it. You are talking to the finger, not to her.) Whether it lifts or just gets the idea of lifting, either way you'll know before I do."*

Then read it. Under a second, two centimetres of lift, and a glance at the crowd: she is in the show.

Somewhere between four and eleven seconds, a movement so small you had to look twice, no glance anywhere: something is running on its own. Nothing at all: treat it as 15.1 and stop.

Whatever you got, you file it and you say nothing about it. Then you either continue at the level you are on, or you close.

If it doesn't come If the probe is inconclusive — and it will be, maybe
one time in four — assume performance and plan accordingly. That costs you nothing. Assuming the other way and going deeper costs the volunteer something, and that is the wrong error to make twice.

And if you have the trapped version — the smile without the eyes — give her the door, quietly, away from the circle, with your body angled away so it isn't a confrontation.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Quick thing. You can drop out of this whenever you feel like it, and I'll make it look like my idea. Nobody here gets told anything. (Then leave. Do not wait for an answer. Waiting for an answer makes her say something, and whatever she says will be the polite one.)"*

15.3 A Drunk Person Got Through

What you see. He asks the same question twice inside a minute. He answers a question you did not ask. His volume is one notch above everyone else's and he cannot hear that it is. He sways when nothing is asking him to sway. His friends are laughing in a specific way — at him, in advance, because they know what is coming and they want to watch it.

What is actually going on. He got through the gate because he was sitting down when you asked, because the fire was loud, because he was enthusiastic, and — be honest — because you wanted a volunteer and he was the one who put his hand up. Chapter 3's test is not a door you walk through once. Run it again thirty seconds in: can he ask you a clear question and still have the answer a moment later? If not, that is your answer, and it does not matter how far in you already are.

What you do. You stop. Now, not after this one. And you stop in a way that never mentions his state — not to him, not to the circle, not as a joke. The public verdict "you're too drunk" is the one sentence from tonight his friends will still be repeating on Sunday, and you will have handed it to them.

So you finish, rather than abort. Same voice, same pace, as though this was always the length of the thing. And you still bring him all the way back, even though from where you are standing nothing appeared to happen at all. That rule has no exceptions in this book.

ROUTINE 15.3 — The Early Finish

What it is An ending that looks planned, for a volunteer who should
never have started.
How long Forty seconds, plus two minutes sitting down afterwards.
What you need A friend of his within arm's reach. Water if there is any.
Prerequisite Nothing. You may need this thirty seconds after an opener.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good — that's the one. (Do not change your tone. The tone is what tells the circle whether something went wrong.) Both feet flat on the ground, take a breath that's a bit deeper than the last one, and let it out slowly. Hands on your knees. (Announce any touch before it happens; on this one you don't need any.) Three — the ground comes back under you. Two — hearing everything around you again, the fire, the bass from over there. One — eyes open, all the way awake, and that's the end of that one. (End on a statement. Never on a question. "Are you back?" hands him a job he cannot do right now.) Sit down for two minutes before you stand up properly. That's not optional, that's the rule for everyone."*

Then, to his friend, half a step away, quiet, no audience:

> *"Do me a favour, sit with him for a bit and get some water into him. He's had a long day."*

And when he wants more — and he will, loudly, within a minute:

"Later. Not tonight. (Say it once. Do not negotiate, do not explain, do not use the word drunk.) Tomorrow afternoon, if you find me, I'll do the good one with you."

Keep that promise if he finds you sober. It costs you four minutes and it is the difference between a rule and a snub.

If it doesn't come If he insists, gets loud, or announces that he is completely fine, you agree with him and stop anyway. You do not win an argument about sobriety with somebody who is not sober, and trying makes it a scene the whole circle now has to watch.

Say it exactly like this:

"You're right, you're fine. We're still done for tonight — I'm out of the good ones and I need a cigarette. (Take the reason onto yourself. Then physically leave the spot. The scene ends when you stop standing in it.)"

Hand him to a friend, not to staff. Staff turns a small thing into an incident with a report attached, and he has done nothing except drink at a festival.

15.4 A Friend Steps In

What you see. Someone appears at her shoulder halfway through and says "okay, that's enough" — or "what are you doing to her" — or says nothing and simply steps between you, which is louder.

What is actually going on. He is doing the correct thing with incomplete information. Look at it from where he is standing: it is two in the morning, a man he

does not know has his friend's wrist, her eyes are closed, and she is not answering when he says her name. There is exactly one right response to that picture, and he is giving it. He may be wrong about the situation. He is not wrong to have reacted.

What you do. You stop mid-sentence. Hands off, immediately, and one full step back. Palms open at hip height so both of them can see where your hands are. You do not explain what hypnosis is. You do not say she agreed. You do not appeal to her to confirm that you are harmless — never use a volunteer as your evidence, that is the exact move that makes the picture worse.

You agree with him. Out loud, first sentence, no qualifier.

Agreeing when you are in the right feels bad and is still correct, for three reasons. Being right costs you the volunteer, the circle, and the rest of the night, and buys you nothing. He is not wrong about the part he can see. And a circle that watches a hypnotist argue about consent has learned something about you that no routine later in the evening will unteach.

But she still has to come back up. That is the hard part of this one: you have to stop and finish at the same time. The order is fixed.

ROUTINE 15.4 — The Handover

What it is Three beats: acknowledge the friend, lead her out, give her
to him. In that order, without a pause between them.
How long Twenty seconds
What you need Both hands visible. One step of space.
Prerequisite Any routine already running.

Beat one — to him. Flat, no smile, no charm. Charm here reads as manipulation.

> *"You're right. Ten seconds and she's yours."*

Beat two — to her. Single register, unhurried. Do not speed up because you are being watched; a rushed lead-out is how people end up muzzy.

> *"Sara — my voice again. (Use her name. It cuts through everything else in the circle.) Feet on the ground, both of them, and you can feel the grass through your shoes. Take one breath in, and let it out slower than you took it in. (Two seconds.) Three — hands and arms are ordinary again. Two — hearing the whole field, the music, your friend next to you. One — eyes open, wide awake, and that's finished."*

Beat three — to him. Then you go.

> *"Thanks for stepping in. That's what you're meant to do. (Mean it. Then leave, and take yourself at least ten metres away.)"*

You do not resume. Not in five minutes, not if she says she wants to. Asking her to choose puts her between a stranger and her friend at two in the morning, and there is no version of that she enjoys.

If it doesn't come If he doesn't accept it — keeps escalating, wants it
to become a confrontation — you do not hold eye contact and you do not match his volume. You name the ending, once, and you walk. Losing an evening is cheap. There is no argument you can win here that is worth more than that.

Say it exactly like this:

"Fair enough. We're done, she's fine, I'm going. (Turn your body first, then your feet. Do not walk backwards, that reads as fear and invites him to follow.)"

15.5 The Crowd Turns

What you see. The laughter changes pitch — it gets higher and shorter. The comments stop being about the situation and start being about him. Someone films from the side rather than the front. You hear "look at him" instead of "look at this". And his shoulders come up around his ears, which is the only signal in this section you actually need.

What is actually going on. You built a spotlight, and then you stopped feeding it. A crowd holding a spotlight with nothing to point at will point it at whatever is softest, and the softest thing in the circle is the person standing in the middle with his eyes closed. It is not malice. It is momentum, and it arrives about forty seconds after your routine stopped being interesting.

(The crowd is not on your side. The crowd is on the side of whatever is funniest.)

This is the most dangerous situation in this book, and the reason is simple: the damage does not land on you. You walk away at four in the morning. He sleeps in a tent nine metres from these people for two more nights, and he will be "the guy who" for the rest of the weekend.

What you do. Four moves, in order, with no thinking in between.

1. End the suggestion. Instantly, mid-word if necessary.

2. Get him out of the middle, and take the spotlight with you by becoming the target yourself.

3. Give the crowd something to do with their bodies. A crowd that is moving is not a crowd that is watching.

4. Close the evening. Not "regain control and continue". This is the one place in this book where the correct move is to end the whole programme, even if you had three more numbers ready and even if everybody would have loved them.

ROUTINE 15.5 — Taking The Spotlight Back

What it is A hard stop that moves the attention off the volunteer and
onto you, then dissolves the geometry that produced it.
How long Thirty seconds, then you are finished for the night.
What you need Your voice at volume. One clap.
Prerequisite Any group routine.

Show register. Short. Flat. No warmth yet — warmth comes afterwards and in private.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Stop. — Eyes open. (One clap, single, not sharp. Then two full seconds of silence. Two seconds is much longer than it sounds and it is doing all the work.) That's him done, and he did the only difficult job here. The rest of you did the sitting-down part. (Now hand them the noise — applause has to have somewhere to go or it becomes something else.) Give him the noise. All of*

it."

Then, without a gap, take their bodies:

"Everybody up. On your feet. Shake your right hand out — both hands — good. Now sit down somewhere you weren't sitting before. (This breaks the seating geometry that built the spotlight. It also gives you nine seconds to walk him out of the middle without anyone watching you do it.) That's us finished. I'm out of the good ones and the fire's nearly gone."

Then, at least a minute later, away from the circle, one-on-one, single register, no jokes:

"That was on me, not on you. I put you in the middle and left you there too long. (Do not ask him if he's okay. It invites him to say yes. Say the true thing and let him answer or not.) You did the part nobody else volunteers for."

If it doesn't come If the crowd keeps going after him once he's out of
the middle, you leave with him. Two people walking away is a boring picture, and a crowd loses interest in a boring picture in about twenty seconds. Walk toward light and people — the water point, a food stall — not into the dark rows of tents.

And the prevention, since you are already reading this section: crowds turn on a volunteer when the funny thing is the person rather than the effect. Every routine you run in front of more than eight people should be funny because of what the hands or the counting or the forgotten word did — never because of what he looks like. Check every number in your set against that before you ever run it at a fire.

15.6 Security Or Camp Staff Arrives

What you see. A vest. A torch beam across the circle. Someone standing slightly too close, waiting for you to notice them.

What is actually going on. Almost always one of two things: somebody reported a scene at a distance, or this is simply their round and thirty people are standing in a walkway at one in the morning. They do not care what hypnosis is, they have no opinion about it, and they are not there to be convinced.

What you do. Stop. Stand up. Hands out of your pockets. Say three sentences and then do what you are told. No explanation, no demonstration, no offer to show them how it works, and above all no using the volunteer as proof that everything is fine. This book has nothing useful to say about rules, permissions or anybody's rights — that is a different book and a different evening. Here it is one line of craft: the fastest way out of this is agreement.

ROUTINE 15.6 — The Twelve-Second Version

What it is What you say to staff so that the conversation ends.
How long Twelve seconds
What you need To be standing up.
Prerequisite None.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"We're finished — that's fine. (Say it before they ask you to be finished. The conversation is over faster if there is nothing left to stop.) We'll clear the path. Sorry for the noise."*

If they ask what you are doing:

> *"Party games. Nothing loud. (Two words and a stop. Do not use the word hypnosis unless they use it first, and if they do, don't decorate it.)"*

Then you actually clear the path, and you do not restart forty metres away in the next hour where they can see you.

If it doesn't come If they want it stopped for good, or want names, you
say yes and you mean yes. There is no version of
arguing here that improves your night. If they were
called because someone was worried, that is worth
knowing — assume the report was made in good faith
and change what you were doing.

15.7 A Strong Emotional Reaction

What you see. Crying that is not laughing-crying — the face goes still first, then wet. Or the breathing changes shape and stays changed. Or she goes very quiet and very heavy and does not answer. Or she says a name.

What is actually going on. Something of her own got touched. Usually not by the content of your suggestion — you were talking about a balloon and a bucket — but by twenty quiet minutes with her eyes shut, which is something most people have not had in months. It is not damage and it is not a breakthrough. It is a person having a real feeling in an unusual place, at the end of a long day, three days from home.

What you do. Lead her out. Immediately, gently, without a count-down into anything and without a

single question about what came up. You do not interpret. You do not go "into it" to resolve it — you are not equipped for that, this is not that kind of book, and a field at two in the morning is not that kind of room. You get a person she trusts. You stay until that person is standing there.

If she wants to talk, you listen and you do not work. No questions that dig. There is one question you may ask, and it is about now, not about then: what she needs at this moment. Water, her tent, her friend, ten minutes of sitting.

ROUTINE 15.7 — The Lead-Out With No Questions

What it is A quiet exit that returns her to the field without touching
whatever she just touched.
How long Ninety seconds, then you sit with her.
What you need A blanket or a jacket if it is cold. Water. Her friend.
Prerequisite Any routine.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"That's alright. I'm here, and you don't have to do anything with this. (Single register, half your normal volume, slower than feels natural. Do not touch her. If she reaches for a hand, that is different — announce it: "I'm going to hold onto your wrist for a second." Wrist or shoulder. Nowhere else.) Feel the ground taking your weight — it's been doing that the whole time. And as you breathe out, you can let the breath out a little longer than you took it in, without making it neat. (Pause. Six seconds. Let her breathe.) Whatever that was, it's yours, and it doesn't have to be sorted out on a field at two in the morning.*

Some part of you knows when it wants to be looked at. It isn't tonight. (Then bring her all the way up. Ordinary voice from here.) Feet on the ground. Hearing the fire, the music from the other stage, my voice. Three — the field comes back. Two — hands and arms are yours, all of it ordinary. One — eyes open when you want them open, and we're finished. Sit here with me for a couple of minutes. That's the rule for everybody."

If she says she remembered something, do not argue and do not confirm:

"Things that turn up with your eyes closed feel exactly like memory and often aren't. I'd hold it loosely."

Then you stop for the night. Not with her, obviously — but also not with anybody else. Not the guy who has been waiting twenty minutes, not "just a quick one", not at the other fire.

Three reasons, and they are all worth more than the number you were about to run. The circle has just watched someone cry, and your next volunteer would be volunteering inside that shadow whether he knows it or not. Your own hands get fast after something like this and your judgement gets worse in a way you cannot feel from the inside. And the single most reliable predictor of a bad evening is somebody continuing after a signal.

If it doesn't come If she does not come back up in the ordinary way, or
keeps crying past a couple of minutes: no more suggestions, none, not even soothing ones. Plain voice, her name, ordinary sentences about ordinary

things — the time, the weather, where her tent is. Get the friend. Water, something warm. Every festival has a medical point and walking someone over to it is not a defeat; it is the sane end of the evening.

15.8 A Suggestion Will Not Release

What you see. His hand stays shut after you have already moved on. He still cannot say the number seven and it has stopped being funny to him. Or he simply tells you, with a slightly odd face: "it's still there."

What is actually going on. Almost always one of two things, and neither of them is an emergency.

The first is an incomplete lead-out — yours. You released the suggestion in a sub-clause while you were already talking about something else, or you released it as a question ("that's gone now, yeah?") instead of as a statement. A question about whether something is gone is an instruction to go and check, and checking is what keeps it alive.

The second is that he would rather keep it. This is the best thing that has happened to him all weekend and letting go on cue ends the attention. He is not lying to you, and pointing at it helps nobody.

(Nothing is stuck. Nothing was ever attached to anything.)

What you do. Two stages, and the first one is the counterintuitive one: you put it back on before you take it off. You can only hand back something you are

currently holding. Then you take it off with a named endpoint, a count, and a physical change he performs himself.

ROUTINE 15.8 — The Two-Stage Release

What it is Re-activate deliberately, then withdraw with a hard ending.
How long Forty-five seconds
What you need Nothing. Do not move his hand for him.
Prerequisite Any suggestion still running.

Stage one — take it back on purpose.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Good — leave it exactly as it is. Make it a bit more, if anything. (Say this as though it were always the plan. From this second, it is the plan.) Your hand is holding onto something I gave it, and it has been doing that properly all evening. And as you make it a little tighter, you'll notice exactly where it's holding — the palm, or two of the fingers, or the wrist. (Pause. Three seconds. Not two.) That's mine, not yours. You've just been carrying it."*

Stage two — take it away with an endpoint.

> *"And now I'm taking it back, and it goes with me. Three — the fingers get the message first. Two — the arm remembers that it's an arm, and the message reaches the whole of it. One — hand open, all the way, and it's ordinary again. (Use the word "ordinary". Not "normal" — normal invites him to compare, and comparing means checking.) Shake it out. Take a breath. That one's finished and it stays finished."*

Never end this with "is it gone?" Ending on a question hands him the job of going to look, and the looking is the thing that keeps it there. End on the statement, then immediately have him do something with the hand — take a cup, hold your phone, throw a bottle cap into the fire.

If it doesn't come If it survives two full runs, stop treating it as a hypnosis problem, because it has stopped being one. Take him ten metres away from the audience — the audience is the reason — drop your voice to ordinary, and give the limb a job it cannot do while holding on. Ask him to carry something for you. Hand him a full cup. Bodies solve this in about four seconds when nobody is watching them solve it.

And if he is enjoying it, say so kindly and give him another way to keep what he actually wants:

> *"You could stretch this out all night and it'd be a good bit. Do the other thing instead — tell them about the counting, that one's better told than watched. (Then he keeps the attention and hands back the hand.)"*

Two rules with no exceptions attached to this section. You never leave a site with a suggestion still running because he "seems fine" and laughed it off. And you run the release even when you are fairly sure there was never anything there to release — it costs forty-five seconds and buys you the only kind of reputation worth having on a campsite.

15.9 You Are Nervous, Or You Have Lost The Thread

The most honest section in the book, so I will start with mine. I have forgotten what I was doing in front of a circle of about twenty people. Twice. The first time I improvised for ninety seconds and it was the worst ninety seconds of that summer. The second time I stopped, closed what was open, and finished four minutes early, and nobody in that circle knows to this day that anything happened.

What you see — from inside. You cannot remember which routine you are in. Your own wording sounds fake in your own mouth. Your hands are cold. You are talking too fast, and — the reliable tell — you have started explaining. Explaining is what people do when they have stopped working.

What is actually going on. You have moved from doing the thing to watching yourself do the thing. All of your attention is on your own performance and none of it is on the person in front of you, which is a problem because she is the only source of information in the situation.

There is a second, more specific version: silence panic. Beginners fill every pause, and the pauses are the working part. A pause that has been framed is not an empty pause — it is the routine. So the fix for both is the same, and it happens to also be good technique.

ROUTINE 15.9 — Ten Seconds

What it is Three sentences that buy you time, all of which are true, none of which claim anything checkable, and each of which is a useful move on its own.

How long Ten to fourteen seconds
What you need To slow down by about a third.
Prerequisite None. Use it at any point in anything.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Stay exactly like that. (Freezes the frame. Also buys you two seconds, and is itself a suggestion.)*
>
> *Take one breath in — and let it out slower than you took it in. (Six to eight seconds, and it deepens whatever is already running rather than interrupting it.)*
>
> *Good. Notice what your hands are doing before I say anything else. (Another five seconds, delegates the work away from you, and hands you the exact information you need to decide what to do next — because now you can watch her hands instead of your own head.)"*

By the end of that you have somewhere between eleven and fourteen seconds of material and one piece of real data. Usually that is enough to remember where you were. If it is not, you finish. A small thing finished cleanly beats a big thing abandoned, every time, and the circle cannot tell the difference between the ending you planned and the ending you took.

Say it exactly like this:

> *"And that's the one. Feet flat, breath out, three — two — one, eyes open and all the way back. (Then, to the circle, ordinary voice:) That's me done, the fire's nearly out and I've got a tent to find."*

If it doesn't come If you are too far gone to close cleanly — shaking hands, no idea what is running, or you have had one

more drink than you told yourself you'd had — you do the lead-out, you say you are finished, and you stop for the night. The gate in Chapter 3 is not only for volunteers. A hypnotist who would not pass his own sobriety test does not get to run one on somebody else.

Two more things, because this is the section people need and nobody writes.

Nervousness itself does not spoil anything. Your voice can shake. Volunteers do not hear a shaking voice as incompetence — they mostly do not hear it at all, because they are busy with their own hands. What spoils it is the three things nervousness makes you do: apologise, explain, and speed up. Cut all three and you can be as frightened as you like.

And when you notice you are running fast, do not aim for "slower". Aim for a number: put a pause of three seconds after every instruction you give for the next minute. Not two. Three feels enormous from where you are standing and reads as calm from where she is.

The Three Sentences That Always Work

Everything above is nine pages long, and at one in the morning you will not have nine pages. So carry three sentences. Each does one job, each is true no matter what just happened, and none of them claims anything that can turn out to be false.

1. "Stay exactly like that." Buys time in any situation, in both registers, at any point in any routine.

Works when you have forgotten what you were doing, when something unexpected happened, and when you simply need four seconds to look at somebody properly.

2. "That's exactly right." Costs nothing and cannot be wrong, because whatever she did is what she did. It removes failure from the room without praising a performance, and it works equally well after a spectacular response and after nothing at all.

3. "Feet on the ground, eyes open, and that's finished." Ends anything. It is a statement, it has a physical instruction in it, and it does not ask permission. This is the sentence you use when a friend intervenes, when staff arrives, when the crowd turns, when you have lost the thread, and when you simply want to stop.

And the mirror image, which is more useful than the list above: three sentences you never say.

"Did it work?" — hands the verdict to somebody who was not in a position to judge, and makes any answer except "no" feel like a lie. **"Try harder."** — turns a permissive frame into a test, and tests are the one thing that reliably produce nothing. **"That's never happened before."** — makes the volunteer the problem, in public, permanently.

Nine Situations, One Line Each

This is the page you read with a torch. Nine situations, and the first sentence you say in each. The first sentence is the whole job — it decides who owns the ending. Everything after it you can work out while you are talking.

• **15.1 Nothing happens** — "Good — open your eyes."

• **15.2 She is playing along** — "Leave both hands right where they are."

• **15.3 A drunk person got through** — "Good — that's the one."

• **15.4 A friend steps in** — "You're right. Ten seconds and she's yours."

• **15.5 The crowd turns** — "Stop. — Eyes open."

• **15.6 Security or camp staff arrives** — "We're finished — that's fine."

• **15.7 A strong emotional reaction** — "That's alright. I'm here, and you don't have to do anything with this."

• **15.8 A suggestion will not release** — "Good — leave it exactly as it is."

• **15.9 You are nervous, or you have lost the thread** — "Stay exactly like that."

Say the sentence first. Find the section afterwards. In that order — the sentence buys you the time you need to read.

Look back through the nine situations and count how many of them start with a decision rather than an accident. The drunk one you took anyway, because he was the only hand in the air. The second round after somebody cried, because the circle was still warm and it seemed a shame. The deeper go with the woman you already knew was playing along, because it was going so well. The show you kept running for another four minutes after the laughter changed pitch.

Every one of those has a moment in it, usually about eight seconds long, in which you knew and continued. I know the length because I have stood inside it — the small flat pause where the honest thing and the interesting thing point in different directions, and the interesting thing has an audience.

Recovery is not the skill. The wording in this chapter is just the tidying up. The skill is stopping, on time, for a reason nobody else in the circle can see yet.

Chapter 16 — After The Festival

Sunday, eleven in the morning. The field looks like a landfill that once had a sound system. You are pulling pegs out of wet ground with cold fingers, your voice is two-thirds gone, your sleeping bag smells of smoke and someone else's cigarettes, and somewhere between the second peg and the third you catch yourself replaying Friday night — the moment the tall guy's hand came off the beer crate and the four people watching made that noise.

Two rows over, a man you have never spoken to folds a tarp and says, without stopping, "you're the guy who did the thing with the hands." Then he keeps walking.

That is the entire aftermath. Take four minutes for it. Then pack the tent, because the field has to be empty by two and nobody cares what happened at the fire.

What follows is the inventory. What you actually have. What rots if you leave it in a drawer. What you throw in the skip at the gate because it only works here. Where the edges are. And three directions, none of which I am selling you.

16.1 What You Have, Measured

Count it before you describe it. Not the good bits — the whole column.

Take a piece of paper, or the back of a wristband, and write down four numbers from the weekend: how many people you asked, how many said yes, how many

produced something visible, how many produced something you will still be telling people about at Christmas. Mine from a mid-size camp two summers ago: nineteen asked, eleven yes, seven visible, one Christmas story. That is not a good weekend or a bad one. That is a weekend.

Do that and the picture stops being a feeling and becomes arithmetic. The feeling on Sunday morning is unreliable in both directions. If Friday went well you will believe you have a gift. If Saturday went badly you will believe the whole book was a con. Both of those are the same mistake, which is judging a technique by your most recent attempt.

So, honestly: what do you have?

You can walk up to people you have never met, in the dark, in the wrong conditions, with no chair, no stage, no microphone, no lighting, no silence, no preparation and no equipment, and in under four minutes produce something that they will describe to other people as strange. Then you can get them out of it cleanly, put them back on their feet, and leave without owing anybody anything.

That is narrower than it sounds when you say it out loud, and it is also rarer than you think. Most people cannot produce anything at all with a stranger in a bad room. You now can, on demand, in a field, at two in the morning, over a bassline.

And you are not a hypnotist. You are someone with roughly a dozen reliable numbers.

(No, you did not hypnotize eleven people. You ran eleven numbers and seven of them landed. She did the

work; you held the frame and kept the timing. That is the whole trick, and it does not become less true with practice.)

A dozen numbers is more than it sounds like. It is a closed, portable, working set. You can run it in any field in any country with nothing in your hands.

A dozen numbers is also less than you think on Sunday morning. Specifically:

• You have **one road into each number.** Somebody with a proper training has three, and takes the second one so smoothly that nobody notices the first one failed. When your one road is blocked, you exit gracefully — which is a real skill, and it is not the same skill.

• You have **no way to help anyone.** Not one line in your set does anything for a person with a problem. That is not modesty, that is the specification.

• Your set is **conditioned to the site.** Loud, dark, half-drunk crowd, everybody in a mood to play, everybody watching. Change three of those variables and you will find out how much of your success was you and how much was the field. (Chapter 16.4 is that list, and it is longer than anybody wants it to be.)

• Your set is **shallow on purpose.** Everything in this book is built to be short, visible, and easy to stop. Nothing in it goes anywhere it would be hard to come back from. That was the design brief and it should stay that way.

Write the four numbers down anyway. In eight months, when you are telling somebody in a kitchen

what you can do, the paper will keep you honest better than your memory will.

16.2 What Decays, And How Fast

Some of this rots and some of it doesn't. The difference matters, because people who quit for a winter usually assume they have lost everything, and then don't come back. They haven't. They have lost about a third of it, and it is a specific third.

These are my numbers from four winters off, not a law of nature. Yours will differ. The order won't.

Timing goes first, and it goes quietly. Six weeks off and your pauses shrink. The four-second silence you used to hold becomes two and a half, and you will swear it was four. You lose it first because it is the only part of this craft that feels bad to do. Nothing in you wants to stand in silence in front of a person. In summer the results train you to hold it; in February nothing trains you at all.

Nerve goes second. Three months off and the approach gets heavy. Not the technique — the eight seconds before it. You will stand near a group with the whole script sitting in your mouth and find a reason to get another drink. This is the most predictable thing in the chapter and the one everybody thinks won't happen to them.

Reading the group goes third. Four or five months and you lose the fast scan: who is already leaning in, who is the guard, who is doing a bit for their friends. This decays because it can only be practiced on live people in a real ring. You cannot rehearse it alone in a

flat; there is nothing to read.

Voice control decays slowly and partially. The pitch drop stays. The rhythm stays. Your volume calibration for noise goes, because you learned it against a specific kind of sound and you no longer have that sound.

Now the part nobody says, because it is boring:

The wordings stay. Word-for-word text is memorized text, and memorized text behaves like song lyrics. A year later you will find the whole of your opener in your mouth in the right order. It might come out flat, but it comes out. This is precisely why this book made you learn wordings instead of principles.

The gate stays. The sober test, the out-loud ask, the stated exit, the two people who have to be able to see you. After one weekend of running it properly it stops being a procedure and becomes the way you start. Habits of refusal are the most durable thing in here. You will still be checking whether somebody can hold a question and keep the answer in three years, in a context that has nothing to do with this.

The way out stays. The reorientation, the full-wake buffer, the ending on a statement instead of a question. It is short, it is always the same, and it is stored in your hands and your mouth rather than in your judgement. That is why it survives.

So: after a winter you have your text, your gate and your exit, and you have lost your timing, your nerve and your eyes. Which means the way back in is not "reread the book." It is ten minutes with one person and a stopwatch.

16.3 The Winter Drill

You do not need to run a festival to stay warm. You need one willing person, four times a winter, and a room with the television off.

ROUTINE 16.3 — The Kitchen Table Number

What it is One hand-heaviness number, run flat and slow on a friend
who already knows what you do, purely to keep your pauses from shrinking.
How long 3 minutes, plus 2 minutes of talking afterwards.
What you need A table. Two chairs. No music, no phone on the table.
A watch with a second hand where you can see it.
Prerequisite The gate from Chapter 3, unchanged. Nothing about a
kitchen makes it optional. Ask out loud, name the exit,
and skip it entirely if the wine is already open.

(Sit at forty-five degrees to her, not opposite. Opposite a table is an interview.)

(Put the watch on the table face-up before you start. You are timing yourself, not her, and you should tell her that.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Put your hand flat on the table. Anywhere. — Right. So you're sitting, the chair's taking your weight, and your hand is on wood that's cooler than your palm is. You'll feel that in a second if you haven't already.*
>
> *(Pause. Four seconds. Count them off the watch. Do not feel them — in winter your four seconds has a habit of arriving as two.)*

"And as you keep your eyes on the back of that hand, you don't have to make anything happen. There's nothing to push. Your hand can do this part without you — it's been resting on things since you were born and it has never once needed instructions.

"You'll start to notice how much heavier it is before you notice when that started. Not whether. How much, and where — the palm or the knuckles or the two middle fingers. Some part of you already knows the difference between holding a hand up and letting one lie there.

(Pause. Six seconds. This is the one you will cut short. Don't.)

"Whether it settles right down into the wood or just goes slow and thick — either way you'll feel the difference between that hand and the other one."

(Then wake her properly, even here, even for three minutes. Feet on the floor. Name the room. Have her lift both hands and shake them out. Finish on a statement: "That's it. Both hands are yours, we're done." Not on a question. Not in a kitchen either.)

If it doesn't come Nothing moves, and she looks at you with the face
friends use. Good — you came for the timing, not the hand. Say: "That one's mine, not yours — I cut the middle short again." Put your own hand flat on the table, say "right, that's the drill," and talk about something else within ten seconds. Do not run it a second time. A friend will let you, and the second one teaches you nothing except how to push.

Run that four times over a winter and your pauses come back inside two sessions. What it will not give you back is nerve or group-reading. Nothing at a kitchen table can. Be clear with yourself about which of the three you are training, because a quiet room is a flattering liar — everything works in a quiet room, including things that would have collapsed in the field.

16.4 What You Throw Away At The Gate

There is a set of things that work at a campsite and nowhere else on earth. Take them home and they will make you worse, and — more to the point — they will make people avoid you.

The show register. The short, flat, firm delivery from Chapter 12 is licensed by a specific situation: a ring of people who all know this is a game, a volunteer who walked into the middle on purpose, and thirty witnesses. Take that voice into a kitchen, a workplace, a bus stop or a conversation with one person you just met, and it stops being a performance register. It becomes a man giving instructions to someone who did not ask for any. There is no version of this where it reads as charming. Leave it in the field.

The eight-second ask. At a festival, speed is politeness — everybody is doing eight things, nobody wants a preamble, and the site itself supplies the frame. Off-site the same speed reads as a hustle, because there is no frame and you are supplying pressure instead. Away from the campsite, whatever you do takes four times as long to set up and you accept that or you don't do it.

The assumption that people want to play. This is the big one. On a campsite the default answer is a soft yes; the whole population has paid money to be somewhere odd for three days. On a Tuesday in a supermarket the default answer is no, and it is a real no, and it is none of your business. You calibrated your entire sense of "people are up for this" on a self-selected crowd in a holiday state of mind. That calibration does not travel.

The closeness. Standing at forty-five degrees with fifteen centimetres between your shoulder and hers is normal at a fire at two in the morning and strange at a bus stop at six in the evening. Same with wrists. The permission you ask for is identical; the distance you stand at is not.

The volume and the pace. You learned to place your voice under a bassline. Indoors, that same delivery is shouting, and the slow deliberate placement that read as calm in a field reads as theatrical in a living room.

The ring as your safety net. At the fire, the circle of people is a witness. It keeps the frame clean, it tells the volunteer what kind of event this is, and it makes it obvious that nothing hidden is happening. Alone in a flat with one person, that witness is gone — and so is the thing that made the whole exchange readable. If you find yourself running numbers with no one else in the room, stop and notice that you have removed the load-bearing wall.

The permission of the place itself. The site says: this is a weekend where odd things happen and everyone agreed to it at the ticket barrier. Nowhere else

says that. You have been borrowing that permission all weekend and you have to hand it back at the gate with your wristband.

16.5 When She Asks You In November

Sooner or later somebody from that weekend turns up in a queue with a basket in her hand and says "do the thing." Four months have passed. The word and the touch from July have gone quiet, because that is what they do.

(Yes, it faded. All of them fade. Nothing in this book was built to keep, and anybody who tells you different is selling you the sequel.)

ROUTINE 16.5 — The November Refresher

What it is A short, honest re-set of an anchor months later, run only when she asks for it, in daylight, in about a minute.
How long 60 seconds, of which 30 are talking.
What you need Her permission out loud. One free hand. A spot to stand
that is not the middle of an aisle.
Prerequisite She asks. You never open this one. If she is with people
who weren't there in July, don't — they have no frame for it, and you'd be performing at her instead of with her.

(Step to the side of the aisle first. Two seconds of moving beats any line you could say about privacy.)

Say it exactly like this:

> *"Can I take your wrist for about ten seconds? Say no and we'll just talk, that's completely fine."*

(Wait for the answer. An actual answer, not a shrug. Take the wrist — thumb underneath, no grip, the same hold as in July.)

"Right. So the July thing has gone quiet, which is what these do — they're not built to last, they're built to be put back. And putting it back is quicker than the first time, because your arm has already been there once and it doesn't need the long version.

"You don't have to remember it. You never remembered it in words anyway. So while I'm holding your wrist here, you can just let that arm stay exactly as heavy as it already is, and let yourself notice whether it settles a little further on its own or just stays where it is.

(Pause. Three seconds. Not two.)

"Either way, that's the part I can't do for you, and you're already doing it.

"Three. Two. One —"

(Touch the same spot on the shoulder you used in July, say the same word you used in July, exactly as flat as you said it then.)

(Then bring her all the way back, in a supermarket, in daylight, without a hint of ceremony: "Feet. Strip lights. Shopping. That's us finished." Let go of the wrist before the last word, not after. End on the statement. Never hand her the last line as a question.)

If it doesn't come Nothing settles, nothing changes, and she laughs at
you. Say: "Then it's gone — that's what they do. It

was never mine to keep either." Let go before you finish the sentence, and put the next sentence on her basket, her weekend, anything. One attempt. There is no second attempt in a supermarket, and a person who has to be talked into it in a queue is a person you have started pushing.

The honest frame, which you should say out loud if she asks: this is a re-set, not a repair. Nothing broke. Nothing was ever installed in the sense she is imagining. You are running the same short piece of craft you ran in July, with a shortcut through ground she has already walked.

16.6 The Limits, Plainly, One Last Time

No lecture. Four lines and a mechanism.

This is not therapy and none of it does what therapy does. Somebody will tell you about panic, or sleep, or their father, or how much they are drinking, and they will tell you because the fire and the odd thing you did have made you look like a person who deals in the inside of heads. You do not. You have twelve numbers and a way to end them. Say so plainly, without the apologetic voice: "That's a real thing and it's outside what I do — I do a party trick, honestly." Then be a person for ten minutes and don't run anything.

This is not for arguments. Using these patterns to get the upper hand with a partner, a flatmate or a friend has one reliable result: they work out what you are doing, and then they stop telling you things. That is not a moral point. That is what happens.

This is not for chatting anybody up. It does not work, and the attempt is the part people remember and repeat. There is nothing else to say about it.

This is not a way of getting anyone to do anything. The critical mind gets quiet; it does not leave the building. Push somebody toward something they are not up for and you get the worst material in the world — compliance-shaped nothing, a person performing a response to be polite, which looks hollow to everyone watching and feels rotten to them afterwards.

(Nobody ever handed you their will. Nobody hands anybody theirs. What you get is a few minutes of someone playing along at the top of their ability, and that is already the best thing on offer.)

Here is the mechanism behind all four, and it is the one warning worth memorizing. The moment you *need* it to work, you get worse at it, in a fixed order: you stop offering permission and start making claims; you shorten the pause because the silence has become unbearable; you talk past the exit instead of naming it; you start explaining what she is feeling instead of leaving the gap for her to fill. And people smell all four of those from a distance. Everything in this craft rests on being the person in the ring who does not need anything, and needing is not something you can act.

16.7 Three Directions

Three. No preference stated, because I don't have one.

More numbers. Add one per season, not five in a weekend. Build to about twenty and stop — past that

you carry cards you never run and your set gets slow to choose from. When you steal a new one, steal the structure and rewrite the wording yourself, in your own mouth, out loud, until it stops sounding like a translation. And put a second road into each of your existing twelve before you add a thirteenth; that is worth more than any new routine.

Or the voice. One skill, six months, dull as gravel: record yourself, listen the next day, cut ten per cent of the words, hold the pauses at their real length. Pitch, pace, placement, and the flat delivery that makes a firm line land without effort. This is the direction almost nobody takes, and it is the one that changes the most, because a mediocre routine in a well-placed voice beats an excellent routine delivered at the wrong speed.

Or neither. Run it three or four times a year, at two festivals and a birthday, and let it stay exactly what it is — a party trick you are unusually good at. Most people who read this book will take this option. Their dozen numbers will still be sitting there in five years, a bit slow at the start of the evening, working fine by midnight. There is nothing wrong with that and no reason to feel like you dropped out of something.

Where this book does not go: turning it into a job. Different craft, different book, different life, and it starts with a lot of things that have nothing to do with the inside of anybody's head.

16.8 Sunday

Go back to two in the morning on the first page of this book. Same field, same fire, same crate. This time stand where the others were standing.

From out here you see a man talking too quietly, and a woman with one hand held out in front of her like she is checking for rain. You cannot hear most of it over the sound system three fields away. You can hear that he stops talking for longer than anyone stops talking, and you notice that nobody fills the gap, which never happens.

Her fingers move about a centimetre. Somebody behind you says a word into their can.

Then he says something short, and she takes her hand back, and she laughs the way people laugh when they have caught themselves out. He is already saying her name and something about her feet, and she is looking at the ground and then at the fire, flexing the hand once, twice, the way you would after carrying a bag too far.

The ring loosens. Two people go to find the toilets. Somebody drops a pallet slat on the fire and the sparks go up and then sideways, flat across the wet grass, toward the fence where a crew in hi-vis has already started taking down the lights for Sunday.

She sits back down and looks at her own palm for a second longer than she means to.

Appendix A — Pocket Cards: Every Routine on One Line

Ninety-six cards, fourteen chapters, one line each. Find the number here, then read the full card before you run it — this page is an index, not a script.

Chapter 3 — The Festival Consent Gate

Card	What it does	How long
3.1 The Two Questions	Checks she can track and hold a conversation	20 s
3.2 The Ask, One On One	The audible, refusable question, two witnesses in earshot	12 s
3.3 The Ask, Inside A Group	Retakes the answer when her friends answered first	15 s
3.4 The Ask, Over The Music	Same ask, rebuilt for somewhere audible is genuinely hard	20 s
3.5 The Exit Line	Hands her a stop button and means it literally	6 s
3.7 The One-Sentence Health Question	Lets her decline medically without naming the reason	8 s
3.8 Asking For The Wrist	Permission for contact, built so "no" is easy	5 s
3.9 The Camera Line	Puts the volunteer in charge of the footage	7 s

Card	What it does	How long
3.10 The Cover	Moves the embarrassment off her and onto you	10 s
3.11 Standing Down	Stop, agree, reorient her, hand her over	25 s

Chapter 4 — Reading The Camp

Card	What it does	How long
4.1 The Three-Second Scan	Four-point sweep, so you pick instead of being picked	3 s
4.4 The Witness	Turns the loudest sceptic into the group's official observer	20 s
4.5 The Pair Split	Puts the other half of a couple inside the routine	15 s setup
4.6 The Bench Bridge	Two seated strangers: one volunteer, one audience of one	25 s
4.7 The Half-Circle Cut	Takes four or five adjacent people out of a big ring	10 s setup
4.8 The Host's Permission	Yes, a volunteer and a safety briefing in one exchange	20–30 s

Chapter 5 — The Approach

Card	What it does	How long
5.2 The Direct Ask	Name the thing, name the price, let them nominate	25–30 s
5.3 The Sideways Game	A suggestibility test wearing a party costume	40 s
5.4 The Invitation	Shrinks what they were promised before anything starts	30–40 s
5.5 The Thirty-Second Pre-Frame	Four sentences that remove the three reasons people brace	30 s
5.6 The Strong Will Turn	Hands "too strong a will" back as the raw material	20 s
5.7 Turning the Ring	Converts a gathering crowd into an audience	10 s

Chapter 6 — The Openers: Suggestibility Tests

Card	What it does	How long
6.1 The Hand Magnet	The gap between her hands closes without her deciding	40 s
6.2 The Finger Vise	Laced fingers won't come apart until you say so	50 s
6.3 The Heavy Arm	An outstretched arm gets heavy and sinks	60 s
6.4 The Balloon and the Bucket	One arm rises, one sinks, and she sees the gap	70 s
6.5 The Sway	Eyes closed, weight goes backward, a sober catcher catches	90 s
6.6 Eyes Glued Shut	Eyelids stay shut while she tries to open them	60 s
6.7 The Stuck Hand	Her hand stays flat on the bench and won't lift	50 s
6.8 The Name That Slips	For a few seconds her own first name won't come	60 s

Chapter 7 — Rapid Inductions Without a Chair

Card	What it does	How long
7.1 The Interrupted Greeting	A handshake that never completes, and your instruction arrives instead	25 s from contact
7.2 The Shoulder Drop	Your hand becomes where her weight goes, then leaves	90 s
7.3 Counting Through The Noise	The main stage's kick drum becomes your metronome	45–70 s
7.4 Fire Fixation	The eyes close because they are tired of being open	4–7 min
7.5 The Breath Ladder	Your sentences ride her out-breaths, one rung per breath	5–8 min

Chapter 8 — Convincers — Making It Undeniable

Card	What it does	How long
8.1 Arm Catalepsy	You let go of her arm and it stays	60–90 s
8.2 The Missing Number	She counts down and one number isn't where she left it	90 s
8.3 The Forgotten Word	An everyday word is briefly out of reach	60 s
8.4 Heavy Eyelids	Finding the muscle that opens the eyes turns out to be work	45 s
8.5 The Anchor Test	Fires a two-minute-old anchor in front of the group	30 s set, 20 s test

Chapter 9 — Deepeners in a Loud Place

Card	What it does	How long
9.1 Fractionation	Almost all the way up, then down again, two or three times	90 s for two cycles
9.2 The Bass Line	Every beat through the bench is one more step down	2 min
9.3 The Descending Count	Five numbers, each dropped onto a breath she is already taking	50 s
9.4 The Fire Deepener	The warmth on her face becomes a dial she turns	2–3 min
9.5 The Weight Ladder	Heaviness delivered one body part at a time, hands first	70–90 s

Chapter 10 — The Numbers: One on One

Card	What it does	How long
10.1 The Glued Hand	Her hand rests on the table and the lifting doesn't arrive	70 s + 20 s test
10.2 The Name That's Gone	The reach for her own first name isn't there	90 s + 30 s test
10.3 The Number That Vanished	She counts to ten out loud and one number is missing	60 s + 25 s test
10.4 The Heavy Phone	Her own phone gets too heavy to lift off her palm	60 s + 20 s test
10.5 The Invisible Guy Rope	Her leg steps over a tent line that isn't there	70 s + 30 s walk
10.6 The Taste Switch	A mouthful of her own water tastes of something else	75 s + 15 s sip
10.7 The Temperature Trick	One hand warm, one cool, and she feels the gap	80 s + 20 s test
10.8 The Laugh Trigger	One agreed word stays funny for about four minutes	70 s + 30 s to remove

Card	What it does	How long
10.9 The Rising Arm	Her arm comes up off her thigh in small jerks	up to 3 min
10.10 The Stuck Shoe	One shoe stays down when she goes to walk	60 s + 20 s test
10.11 The Forgotten Number Four	She counts to ten, it sounds normal, four never arrives	2 min + 30 s test
10.12 The Friend Who Isn't There	One named person drops out of the circle for twenty seconds	2 min + 20 s live

Chapter 11 — The Numbers: Small Circle

Card	What it does	How long
11.1 The Group Hand Lock	The whole circle laces fingers; some hands stay together longer	90 s
11.2 The Passed Yawn	A yawn goes round and stops being anybody's decision	60–90 s
11.3 The Circle Count	The count comes round and one man's number isn't there	2–3 min
11.4 The Bench That Holds On	The warm patch under their palms grows an edge, and it moves	2 min
11.5 The Name Nobody Can Say	One name goes missing from the whole circle at once	3 min
11.6 The Chain	Something travels along held hands in seating order	4–6 min
11.7 The Group Anchor	One sound and one word belong to the circle all night	2 min to set

Chapter 12 — The Campfire Show

Card	What it does	How long
12.3 The Drop-In	Takes a talking circle by starting instead of announcing	25–40 s
12.5 House Rules In Forty Seconds	The public frame: what it is, who can't play, the way out	90–120 s
12.6 The Whole Circle At Once	Everyone runs one arm test, then sees where the hands landed	90 s
12.8 Four Out Of Thirty	Three to five to the bench, a job for the other twenty-six	45–60 s
12.9 The Row	Group induction for three to five seated volunteers	2 min
12.10 The Lock Down The Line	Each volunteer in turn finds one arm won't bend	2 min for four
12.15 The Last Ninety Seconds	Brings the whole row back and holds them seated	90 s

Chapter 13 — Anchors That Survive Until Saturday

Card	What it does	How long
13.1 Naming It	Names the state at the top of it, then once more	25 s
13.2 The Four-Second Shoulder	A silent marker set on the shoulder at the peak	15 s to set
13.3 Borrowing the Main Stage	Ties the state to a noise the festival keeps making	20 s to set
13.4 The Cold Test	Fires the trigger ten minutes later, mid-conversation, no build-up	6 s
13.5 The Thirty-Second Top-Up	Deliberately boring morning refresh: fire, hold, set again	30 s
13.6 Taking It Back	Overwrites the trigger back into an ordinary word	2 min + three flat firings

Chapter 14 — Waking Up — Every Single Time

Card	What it does	How long
14.2 The Standard Return	Give-back, count, orientation, activation — after every routine	70–90 s
14.3 The Two-Minute Buffer	Small talk that is also a balance and speech test	2 min
14.5 The Long Runway	Slower second exit for the person whose eyes stayed shut	40 s + up to 2 min
14.6 The Clean Exit	Immediate return for somebody who has started crying	60 s, then hand over
14.7 Taking The Room Away	Ends runaway laughter by removing the audience and the rhythm	30–60 s
14.8 The Ordinary Wake-Up	Wakes somebody genuinely asleep, then closes anyway	90 s
14.9 Handing It Back As Hers	Frames surfaced material as imagination and ends it	20 s, then 14.2

Card	What it does	How long
14.10 The Two Minutes After	You ask one question and then stop talking	2 min

Chapter 15 — When It Goes Wrong

Card	What it does	How long
15.1 The Clean Exit	Three-sentence close for a test that produced nothing	12 s
15.2 The Small Probe	A test with no correct performance, so the answer tells you	25 s
15.3 The Early Finish	An ending that looks planned, for a volunteer who shouldn't have started	40 s + 2 min seated
15.4 The Handover	Acknowledge the friend, lead her out, give her to him	20 s
15.5 Taking The Spotlight Back	Attention off the volunteer, then break the geometry	30 s
15.6 The Twelve-Second Version	What you say to staff so that the conversation ends	12 s
15.7 The Lead-Out With No Questions	Returns her to the field without touching what surfaced	90 s, then you sit
Card	What it does	How long
15.8 The Two-Stage Release	Re-activate on purpose, then	45 s

Card	What it does	How long
	withdraw with a hard ending	
15.9 Ten Seconds	Three true sentences that buy you time and one piece of data	10–14 s

Chapter 16 — After The Festival

Card	What it does	How long
16.3 The Kitchen Table Number	One hand-heaviness number, flat and slow, to keep your pauses	3 min + 2 min talking
16.5 The November Refresher	Honest re-set of an anchor months later, in daylight	60 s

Appendix B — The Twenty-Minute Set

Eight positions, twenty minutes on paper, twenty-three in practice. Full text in 12.11.

Clock	Slot	Runs on	If it doesn't
00:00–02:00	Announcement and consent	12.3, then 12.5	No substitute. Go back to 12.2 and rebuild the ring.
02:00–04:00	Mass test	12.6	Shrink the claim, not the show. Six movers is a casting list.
04:00–05:00	The pick	12.7, 12.8	Take two volunteers. Never spend two minutes recruiting.
05:00–07:00	Induction	12.9	Tests show, not trance show. Three mass tests, then end.
07:00–09:00	Convincer	12.10	One more, different in kind — 8.3, which reads in the dark.

Clock	Slot	Runs on	If it doesn't
09:00–17:00	Three numbers	Chapters 10 and 11, filtered	Cut from the back, never the front.
17:00–19:00	Finale	12.12	Repeat your biggest laugh deliberately, as a curtain call.
19:00–20:00	Wake-up and full-awake buffer	12.15	No substitute exists.

The abort hierarchy.

1. First out: the third number, then the second, then the stretch on the convincer, then the finale's build. In that order, without hesitation.

2. Second: the genre. Change it without announcing it — three mass tests back to back is a complete eight-minute show, and you are the only person who knows what was supposed to happen.

3. Never cut: the four points of the announcement (12.5), the mass test (12.6), and the wake-up with the full-awake buffer (12.15). Not shortened, not merged into the goodbye, not run while people are already standing.

Appendix C — Troubleshooting Index

Filed under what you are looking at, not under what it is called. Chapter and card, then the first sentence out of your mouth.

Anchor doesn't fire in the morning — 13 · 13.5 · "Give me thirty seconds and then I'll leave you alone."

Arm won't come down — 15 · 15.8 · "Good — leave it exactly as it is."

Awkward moment lands on the volunteer — 3 · 3.10 · "That one's on me — I set that up badly, she did exactly what I asked."

Circle won't go quiet — 12 · 12.3 · "Right. I need eleven of you and I need about twenty minutes."

Convincer fails and everybody is watching — 8 · 8.7, Rescue Three · "That one's not landing tonight. Here's the one that does."

Crowd forms while you're working — 5 · 5.7 · "Everyone — two things. Stay where you are, and stay quiet until I say her name out loud."

Crowd turning on the volunteer — 15 · 15.5 · "Stop. — Eyes open."

Eyes stay shut — 14 · 14.5 · "There's no rush on this."

Filming, and she looks uncomfortable — 3 · 3.10 · "Delete that one, yeah? Cheers."

Friend steps in — 15 · 15.4 · "You're right. Ten seconds and she's yours."

Friend steps in before you have started — 3 · 3.11 · "You're right. We're done."

Group answers the question for her — 3 · 3.3 · "Ignore this lot for a second. It's your call, not theirs."

Heckler, drunk and friendly — 12 · 12.14 · "You. I need you, actually. Stand here, this side of me."

Heckler, wrecking his own mate on the bench — 12 · 12.14 · "Kev. He can hear every word you say."

"I've got too strong a will" — 5 · 5.6 · "Good. That's the useful kind."

Induction takes on nobody in the show — 12 · 12.13 · "Right — the good one."

Laughing won't stop, one volunteer — 14 · 14.7 · "Yeah, that one gets people. Have a laugh, it's allowed."

Laughing takes a circle routine apart — 11 · "The one who laughs it apart" · "This is going to be funny. It's supposed to be funny — if nobody laughs I've done it wrong."

Nothing happens — 15 · 15.1 · "Good — open your eyes."

Phones come up mid-routine — 3 · 3.9 · "Film it if you want — but it's hers, not yours."

Sceptic announces it's rubbish — 4 · 4.4 · "You think it's rubbish."

Sceptic in a show, arms folded — 12 · 12.14 · "Half of that's true, and I'd rather you said it out loud than sat there thinking it."

Security or camp staff arrives — 15 · 15.6 · "We're finished — that's fine."

She cries — 14 · 14.6 · "Okay — we're stopping here."

She goes somewhere heavy and won't come back on her own — 15 · 15.7 · "That's alright. I'm here, and you don't have to do anything with this."

She has genuinely fallen asleep — 14 · 14.8 · "You dropped off — happens to about one in ten out here."

She's faking it — 15 · 15.2 · "Leave both hands right where they are."

Something that looks like a memory turns up — 14 · 14.9 · "That's your imagination making something up on the spot."

Suggestion won't release — 15 · 15.8 · "Good — leave it exactly as it is."

Suggestion won't release, and he doesn't want it to — 15 · 15.8 · "You could stretch this out all night and it'd be a good bit."

They apologise for failing — 15 · 15.1 · "You're not the one who has to be sorry — I picked the loudest spot on the campsite."

Too drunk — spotted late — 15 · 15.3 · "Good — that's the one."

Too drunk, and he argues about it — 15 · 15.3 · "You're right, you're fine. We're still done for tonight."

You lose your thread — 15 · 15.9 · "Stay exactly like that."

Appendix D — Glossary

Words used in this book, in the sense this book uses them. Some of them mean slightly different things elsewhere in the trade. Where that is the case, it is noted.

Abreaction — A strong emotional reaction that arrives without warning, usually attached to something real in the person's life rather than to anything you suggested. Rare. Not dangerous in itself. Handled by ending the session cleanly, staying present, and not asking questions. See 15.7.

Anchor — A deliberately built connection between a signal (a word, a touch, a sound) and a state, so the signal can later bring the state back. Anchors fade when unused and strengthen when used. They are not permanent, and nobody who tells you otherwise has tested one on a Sunday. See chapter 13.

Catalepsy — A limb that stays where it is put, holding a position without visible effort and without the person deciding to hold it. The most visually convincing thing in this book and the reason 8.1 exists.

Compliance — Someone going along with the routine because the situation invites it and it is fun, rather than because their experience has genuinely shifted. Not cheating and not a failure. It is roughly half of what you will see at a campsite, it is perfectly acceptable there, and the only thing that matters is that you can tell the difference. See 2.3 and 15.2.

Convincer — A short demonstration whose purpose is not entertainment but proof: it shows the volunteer,

and everyone watching, that something has actually changed. Outdoors, without a dim room to do the work for you, convincers carry the evening. See chapter 8.

Deepener — Anything that takes an existing state further rather than creating one. Counting, fractionation, breath, weight, warmth. See chapter 9.

Fractionation — Bringing someone part of the way out and then back in, two or three times. Each return goes further than the last. The strongest deepener in the book and the cheapest. See 9.1.

Ideomotor response — Movement that happens without a decision to move: a hand drifting up, a body swaying, fingers tightening. It is the visible evidence that a suggestion has landed somewhere other than the part of the person that argues.

Induction — The transition from ordinary attention into the working state. In this book, always short, and always built for someone who is standing on grass or sitting on a beer bench rather than reclining in a chair. See chapter 7.

Number — This book's word for a complete self-contained routine, borrowed from stage slang. A number has a hook, an install, a test, and a release. One number, one goal. See chapters 10 to 12.

Pacing and leading — Beginning with what is verifiably true (the weight of a hand, the noise from the main stage, the warmth of the fire) and letting that truth carry a sentence into what cannot be checked. The first two of the seven layers. See 2.5.

Permissive register — The inviting tone used one-to-one: *you can*, *let it*, *nothing to force*. Lowers guardedness and removes performance pressure. Contrast with the show register. See §2 of chapter 2 and chapter 11.

Post-hypnotic suggestion — A suggestion set now that is meant to operate later, usually attached to a trigger. Every one of them is taken back by name during the wake-up. Every single one. See chapter 14.

Pre-frame — The thirty seconds before anything begins, in which you remove the three usual reasons people resist: that it is sleep, that they lose awareness, and that failing says something about them. See 5.4.

Presupposition — Building the thing you want into the grammar of the sentence rather than claiming it. Not *your arm will get heavy* but *you might notice how heavy it gets*. The doubt lands on the noticing, never on the event. The single most useful pattern in the book.

Ratification — Pointing out, after the fact, that something already happened. Distinct from a promise, which points forward and can therefore fail.

Reactance — The reflex to push back against being told what to experience. Most of the sentence construction in this book exists to avoid triggering it. Note the wording: the working state is *low in reactance*, not free of criticism. The critical mind is quieted, not switched off.

Register — The tone you are working in. This book uses two, and mixing them is the most common tonal error a beginner makes. See §2 of the brief and chapter

11.

Show register — The firmer, shorter, more rhythmic tone used with a group: *Sleep. Down. Eyes closed.* Legitimate in front of a circle, where everyone knows it is a performance and the group is watching. Wrong in a one-to-one conversation, where it reads as pushy.

Suggestibility test — A short exercise that is simultaneously a diagnosis and a small induction. Tells you who to work with and warms them up while doing it. Always the first thing you run. See chapter 6.

Trance — The working state: narrowed attention, lowered checking, greater responsiveness to suggestion. Not sleep, not unconsciousness, not surrender of will. *(Nobody is ever asleep. If they are, see 14.6.)*

Utilisation — Using whatever the environment hands you instead of fighting it. At a festival this mostly means the noise: the bass line from the main stage becomes the metronome, the crowd's cheering becomes the deepener. See 7.3 and 9.2.

Volunteer — The person you are working with. Called a volunteer throughout this book rather than a subject, because the word contains the only thing that matters about their participation.

Wake-up buffer — The two minutes between opening their eyes and letting them walk away, during which you confirm they are fully back. Not politeness. Technique. See 14.3.

About the Author

Felix Ravenholt is the pen name used for this hypnosis handbook. It is not a stage identity and there is no touring show behind it. The name exists so that a body of practical material can be written down in one consistent voice, and so that the material can be judged on whether it works rather than on whose face is on the back cover.

What is behind the name is a working method rather than a biography: routines are written down only once they have been run repeatedly under bad conditions — in noise, in the dark, with strangers, with an audience that did not sit down quietly and wait. Anything that only works in a warm room with a reclining chair does not make it into these books, however elegant it looks on paper.

Two commitments run through everything published under this name.

The first is that the safety material is not decoration. The consent gate in chapter 3 is longer than the chapter on inductions, and that is deliberate. Books in this field have a long habit of putting a warning paragraph at the front and then writing three hundred pages as though it were not there.

The second is that nothing is claimed that cannot be delivered. There is no hidden technique that works on everyone, there is no permanent effect from one evening, and there is no version of this craft that overrides another person's will. Where this book gives you a number, it also tells you roughly how often it will

not come, and what to say when that happens. That is not modesty. A reader who is told the truth about the failure rate stays in the craft; a reader who is promised certainty quits on the third evening and assumes it was their fault.

(There is a version of this page that lists qualifications and hours of training. It would look more impressive and it would tell you nothing about whether the routine on page 140 works at two in the morning.)