

# CULT

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**Introduction:** *Cult* is a card-based strategy game about fanciful religious cults. You start with a single god with no followers, and during the game, you develop a cult of followers for your god and build a temple to your god. You'll be in competition with other cults, and you may eventually add other gods and cults to your pantheon. Your goal in the game is to attract more followers (and stronger followers) to your cult and to build complete temples.

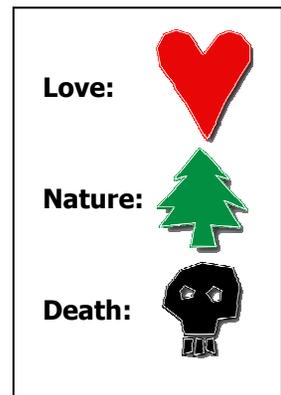
**Object:** The object of *Cult* is to score the most points at the end of the game. You score points for every follower you have. Some followers are more valuable than others. You also score points for having completed temples to your gods.

**Parts:** *Cult* includes the following parts:

- **The main deck of cards** (with blue backs). This contains temple parts, titles and realms for your god, cards that earn you coins, and other special cards to play.
- **The Follower deck** (with purple backs). This contains followers that you can try to add to your cult.
- **The Starter deck** (with gray backs). This contains the starting gods, some explanatory cards, and temple parts for purchase if you are using the variant rules.
- **Coin tokens.** These are the money supply for the game. Each token represents one coin.
- **These rules** that you're reading.

**An Introduction to Cult Religions:** In *Cult*, your god starts out with no power. Your god is little more than a forgotten dusty stone statue in an abandoned hut. As you play, you'll increase your god's power and ability to attract followers. There are three main areas where gods hold power in the game; Love, Nature, and Death. These three areas are indicated in the game by icons on cards and followers as shown in the box to the right. A god can have power in any of these areas, or in a combination of the areas, depending on what cards you play from your hand. There are several ways to improve your god's standing:

- Play a **Realm** or **Title** card on your god. Your god can have one realm and one title at any time. Some realms and titles come with no bonuses, while others have heart, tree, or skull symbols on them that increase your god's power. Still others may give your god a special power to use.
- Play **Temple Parts** to build a temple for your god. The temple parts may also have symbols on them which can enhance your god's power.



As the game progresses, your god will grow in power, and you may decide to change your god's realm, title, or temple to suit your strategy.

**Setup:** To prepare for play, follow this procedure:

- 1) Give each player one of the Elder Gods from the Starter deck. They are all equal, so it's just a matter of taste. Each player starts with one god but may add another god to start a second cult later in the game.
- 2) Give each player five coin tokens. Place the rest of the coins in the center of the playing area for use during the game.
- 3) Shuffle the main deck and deal each player five cards from the main deck. Place the rest of the main deck in the center of the playing area.
- 4) In the Followers deck, find the "End of Days" card and remove it. Set it to one side – it will be used later on. Make sure the "Prophecy" card is placed into the Followers deck.
- 5) Shuffle the rest of the Followers deck and place it in the center of the playing area.
- 6) Each player should place her Elder God in front of her spot. This founds the player's cult.
- 7) Place the extra Buyable Temple Parts from the Starters deck somewhere nearby so people can buy them later.
- 8) Decide who's going first in a non-violent way. Play proceeds clockwise with each player taking turns in order.

This completes the setup for the game. You're ready to play!

**Game Play:** Each turn progresses as follows:

### Step 1. Draw a Follower card

The Follower cards represent followers that you can recruit to your cult. There are different kinds of followers. They are worth different numbers of points (listed on each card as the **Value**). They also have different requirements to join your cult. Three example followers are shown at the right.

The followers may have a **Minimum** or **Maximum** rating or both, and the Minimum and Maximum can be indicated by gray circles or by skulls, hearts, or trees. If they're indicated by a specific symbol (i.e. a skull, heart, or tree) then you must meet the specific requirements with the appropriate symbol. If the symbol is a gray circle, then you can meet the requirement with any type of symbol.

The Minimum (**Min**) rating is the minimum number of symbols you have to have played on your god for the follower to join you. For example, the High Druid shown here will only join your cult if you have four or more total tree symbols showing in your god's title, realm, and temple parts. The Worshippers above will only join you if you have at least one symbol of any type showing (their Min is one gray circle, so the one symbol can be of any type).

The Maximum (**Max**) rating is the maximum number of symbols you can have to support a follower. If your cult has more symbols than this maximum limit, the follower finds your religion too complex and scary and goes elsewhere for enlightenment. For example, the Heathens above will only join your cult if your god has three or fewer symbols (of any type) showing.

If one of your gods meets the requirements of the follower, the follower will join that god. Take the follower card and play it face up next to your god. When the game ends, you'll score points for this follower (the Value listed on the card) if it is still in your cult. If you have two gods and the follower could join either god, then you can choose which god the follower will join.

If you do not meet the minimum (Min) requirements for the follower, you can substitute coins for symbols. For example, the High Druid card shown above requires four tree symbols. If you have one tree symbol showing, you can pay three coins (the difference between your one tree and the Druid's required four) to the pile in the middle and the Druid will join your cult. In this case, however, he is "unsupported," which means if you get purged, he will leave your cult (see **Purges** below).

If you exceed the maximum (Max) requirement for a follower (i.e., you have too many symbols for the follower), that follower will not join you, and you cannot pay gold to keep it.

If you can't take on the follower you draw, and you can't afford or choose not to pay coins to recruit it, then you must pass the follower clockwise around the table to the next player. That player now gets a chance to add the follower to his or her cult following the same rules you just used. The follower gets passed around from player to player until it either gets added to a cult or until it comes back to you, in which case you discard the follower face up next to the Follower draw pile.

If you draw the **Prophecy** card, set it aside someplace out of the way, and add the **End of Days** card to the top of the discard pile. The prophecy has now established when the game will end.

If you run out of Follower cards to draw, then turn the discard pile over **without shuffling the cards** and use this as the Follower deck.

When a player draws the **End of Days** card, the game is immediately over. Count up your score and see who wins! (See **Scoring** below).

### Step 2. Draw cards

You can draw cards in three ways. You can only choose one of these ways per turn.

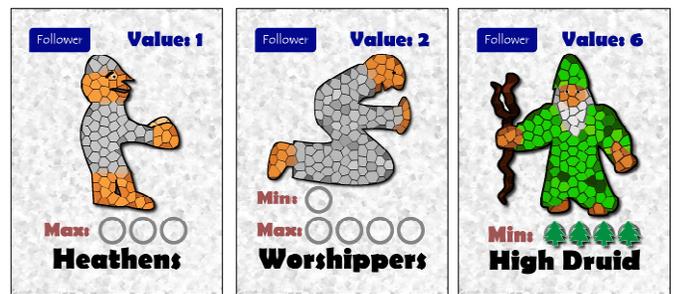
- 1) Draw the top two cards from the deck, or
- 2) Pay one coin to take the top card from the main deck discard pile, or
- 3) Pay five coins to buy a temple part from the unused Buyable Temple Parts cards from the starters deck.

You can only use the second option above to buy a God, Realm, Title, or a temple part (Foundation, Altar, Wall, Dome), and you can only buy the topmost card – you can't dig down to get an earlier card, even if it was discarded on the previous turn. You can never buy Coin cards or Special cards in this way.

### Step 3. Play cards

At this point, you can play as many cards as you wish. The various card types are discussed below:

- **Coins** – You can play coin cards to increase your wealth. Coin cards give you from two to six coins at a time. They also trigger **Collection Plates** (see below).



- **Realms and Titles** – Realm cards indicate what your god controls. Title cards give your god a special name. So, for example, your god could be Keep the Destroyer (*Title*), God of War (*Realm*). You can play these cards on any of your gods. They cost nothing to play. You can also replace an old title or realm that you've already played with a new one from your hand if you like, but you can't just remove a realm or title without replacing it.

**Title Cards with Special Functions** - Title cards can sometimes grant special powers. You can only use these powers once per turn. Some additional comments on particular titles are below:

- **The Overlord** – This title's special power can be used at any time during a player's turn, including at the start when dealing with followers. If you forget to use the power during your turn, though, you can't go back and do it later after your turn is over.
- **Of a Thousand Eyes** – When drawing cards (Step 2 above), the player may pay a coin and draw three cards instead of two. The player may only keep two of the three cards drawn, but this increases the chance of getting a useful card. The card that the player doesn't take is discarded. This title can only be used when drawing two cards from the deck – it doesn't apply when you're buying a card from the discard pile.
- **Of the Irresistible Charm** – you can lure away any follower of any value you choose. You can add the stolen follower to any of your gods, even if it is unsupported. You do not have to pay to support the stolen follower (although you do need to pay five coins to steal it). You **may not** steal more than one follower per turn in this way.
- **The Destroyer** – You may pay five coins to destroy another player's uppermost temple piece. If you are destroying a wall, and your target has two walls, then you get to choose which wall to destroy. You **may not** destroy more than one temple piece per turn in this way.
- **Temple Parts** – Once your god has a realm and title, you can start building a temple to your god. The temples consist of five parts, and the parts must be built in order. These parts are as follows:
  - **Foundation** – The first part to play, at the bottom of the temple
  - **Altar** – the second piece played on top of the foundation
  - **Walls** – you need two walls, played to either side of the foundation and altar
  - **Dome** – the last piece played at the top. Domes always have multiple symbols (except for the dome you can buy from the starter deck in the variant rules, which has no symbols). A Dome will also give your temple a name, which has no game effect – it's just for fun.

Temple parts can be plain, or they can have skull, heart, or tree symbols on them that enhance your god's power. They can also contain **Collection Plates**. If your temple part has a collection plate on it, then every time somebody plays a coin card, you get one coin along with them. Some notes:

- The coin you get is an additional coin, not taken from the coins the player gets from the coin card played.
- If your temple has multiple collection plates, then you get a coin for each plate.
- You get a coin for your collection plate even if you're the one who played the coin card. The collection plate coin is extra.

Important notes: Each temple part costs one coin to build. If you want, you can replace old temple parts with new ones from your hand, but you need to pay another coin for the new part. If you lose your realm or title somehow, you do not lose the temple parts you've already built, but you cannot add any parts to your temple or swap out existing parts until you once again have both a realm and a title.

**Buyable Temple Parts** – Several extra temple parts (with pink backgrounds) are provided in the Starters deck. These extra parts can be purchased for five coins each in place of drawing cards during a turn. Only one card can be purchased in this way per turn. The purchased card is added to the player's hand, and it costs an additional coin to build it into a temple. If the purchased part is ever removed from a temple for any reason, it does not go into the regular discard pile. Instead, it is placed to the side with the other buyable parts and may be purchased again.

- **God cards** – you start the game with one god. If you draw another god card, you can start a second cult with the new god. You can't have more than two cults going at once. If you lose a god somehow, you can replace it as long as you never have more than two gods at a time. You cannot swap realms, titles, followers, or temple parts between your gods except when directed to by a special card.

If you wish, you can always trade in a god card for a free coin. This does **not** trigger collection plates. You can even trade in a god card you've already played to start a cult. If you do this, you lose all realms, titles, temple parts, and followers you've played on that god, but you do get a coin. You can trade in a god card for a coin at any time during your turn, including while you're dealing with the follower card at the start of your turn.

- **Special cards** – there are a variety of special cards that allow you to take unusual actions, often enabling you to mess with other players' gods, temples, and followers.

Some Special cards may need more clarification:

- **Purge** and **Mass Purge** – Purge cards are directed at one specific player. Mass Purge affects all players. If you are purged, you must go through all followers of all your gods and check to see if you meet the minimum and maximum requirements for those followers. If you do, then the follower is “supported” and you can keep it. If you don’t meet the requirements, then the follower is “unsupported,” and you lose the follower to the Follower discard pile. You cannot pay coins to keep an unsupported follower during a purge.  
**A note on follower support:** It may well happen that your followers shift from being supported to unsupported as the game goes on. For example, you may pick up Heathens early on when your god is starting out, and later on, you add enough symbols that you exceed the maximum for Heathens. This is OK – you get to keep your followers even if they’re unsupported until they get purged or removed in some other way.
- **Indoctrination** – This card can be played out-of-turn, whenever it is needed.
- **Avarice** – You give your lowest-ranked (lowest value) follower to another player in exchange for all of that player’s coins. The player you rob gets to keep the follower you provide without paying for it, even if it is unsupported (below the minimum or above the maximum).
- **Cultural Exchange** – Pick an opponent. If you have fewer gods than she does, steal one of her gods (along with realm and/or title, if the god has either in play). If you both have the same number of gods, then trade one of your gods (with realm and/or title) for one of her gods (with realm and/or title). The god you steal and the god you trade can be either an Elder God (the starting god) or one that has been played later. Any temple pieces and followers owned by either god remain with the players who had them originally and are **not** traded. The player you target with this card may reassign any temples or followers to any god she controls – either from the god that was lost to an old god or new god, or from an old god to a newly acquired god. However, the player may not break up a temple into its component parts – it must be assigned to either an old god or the newly acquired god unaltered, in the form it was in before the Cultural Exchange card was played.

#### Step 4. Discard if necessary

When you’re done playing cards, you need to have five or fewer cards in your hand. If you’ve played enough cards to be at five or fewer, then your turn ends. If you have more than five, you must discard the extra ones to get down to five cards. You **may not** discard additional cards if your hand is at five or fewer cards (for example, in order to cover up a temple piece you’ve discarded, so that the next player can’t buy it off the discard pile).

After these four steps, your turn is completed, and play passes clockwise to the next player.

#### Ending the Game

The game ends immediately when the **End of Days** card is drawn from the Followers deck. The player drawing End of Days does not get to take a turn. Players then calculate their scores as indicated below.

#### Scoring

At the end of the game, each player scores points in two ways:

- Follower points - for each follower of all gods. The points scored are the “Value” indicated on the Follower cards. It doesn’t matter if the followers are supported – you get points for all the followers you have at the end.
- Temple points – for each complete temple (with all five parts: Foundation, Altar, two Walls, and a Dome), the player scores five points.

No points are scored for coins – money is useless when the world ends.

The player with the most total points for followers and temples wins the game.

#### Variations

There are several changes you can make to the rules for a different style of play. They are not required. You should be clear with all players before playing if you are using any of these extra rules.

- **Pay-to-Purge** – During her turn, a player may pay five coins to trigger a mass purge.
- **Unlimited Pantheon** – The limit of two gods is removed; any god card can be played to start a new cult at any time. Note – this has the potential to lead to more unbalanced games!
- **Doom is at Hand** – Insert the Prophecy card somewhere in the top 15 follower cards to ensure a shorter game
- **Five or Six Players** – For bigger groups, take starting gods out of the main deck for the additional players.

**Please tell your friends about Cult!**

**If you have suggestions, questions, or comments, please contact the author at [dave@planktongames.com](mailto:dave@planktongames.com)**

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