

CULT OF DIONYSUS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Mystery Cults series for the Amazons Vs Valkyries adventure setting. The religious cults presented here are just a few of the hundreds that exist in this setting. Some are dedicated to chthonic gods that are nearly forgotten, while others worship new deities, such as Alexander the Great. These cults are most common in Greece and the Greek colonies, but also exist in Egypt, Persia, Rome, and Carthage. Even in less civilized lands druids, witch doctors, and other religious leaders join together, keep secrets, pursue common goals, and organize themselves in a hierarchy.

MYSTERY CULTS

Mystery cults are secret societies that exist within religious institutions. Like other secret societies, their existence is well known, but their rituals, lore, and objectives are concealed. Only the initiated are allowed access to these secrets.

Levels of Initiation. Cult membership is divided into a hierarchy of at least twenty degrees or ranks. Some cults have more than sixty ranks. Only the high priestess (or priest) is privy to all the cult's secrets.

Exclusivity. None of these cults require their members to disavow or deny other deities and cults. In fact, many people are simultaneously members of multiple cults.

Cult Secrets. Only the initiated know the true name of the cult's deity, and they are forbidden to speak it to anyone outside the cult. At each level of initiation, a different true name is revealed to the member with only the high priestess knowing the actual true name of the deity. Mystery cults also harbor many other secrets and esoteric lore. Some examples are listed on the table below.



D20	Secret Lore
1	Facts about mythical events
2	Location of an entrance to the Underworld
3	Location of a gate to another dimension
4	Location of a prison holding a demon or deity
5	Formula for creating magical items
6	Rare spells
7	Facts about other planes in the multiverse
8	Facts about a mythical beast
9	Facts about distant lands
10	The true ambitions of a major political figure
11	Archaic or extinct language(s)
12	Secret of navigating the tunnels of Europa
13	Lore of a lost or forgotten civilization
14	Location of a legendary magic item
15	Clues or answer to a puzzle or riddle
16	Location of a sacred site
17	Lore about a humanoid or monstrous race
18	Lore of a lost, magic-like technology
19	Location of a magical island
20	Lore about the Amazons Vs Valkyries conflict

Initiation Fees. Although membership in most cults is open to everyone, initiation rites have fees. These fees offset the cost of the ritual and help support the temple and its ambitions. The amount of the fee increases with each degree and depends on many factors, including how much the applicant can afford and how much the cult leaders desire the new member.



Initiation Times. Most cults conduct initiations once per year. Common dates include the first full Moon after the Winter Solstice, the Spring Equinox, and the Summer Solstice. The initiation process usually involves preliminary ritual purification, eating sacred foods, and confessing of wrong doing. This takes at least three days and sometimes up to two weeks. The actual ceremony begins at sundown and continues until sunrise. During the ritual, the initiates consume psychoactive substances and venture into a deep cavern where they have unnerving encounters with deities and demons.

Membership Advantage. Besides access to secret lore and powerful associates, being a cult member has other perks. Membership can mean that your business wins a lucrative contract from a trade guild or local magistrate. It could mean that your child is educated by an elite, Greek tutor, or that your competitor suffers a tragic setback.

Leadership and Members. Cult hierarchies are separate from temple priesthods. While most leadership positions within the cults are occupied by priestesses (or priests), not all temple priestesses are members of the mystery cult. Likewise, most cult members are not priestesses or employed by the temple; they are private citizens, lawyers, merchants, stage actors, lords, scribes, and princesses.



THE CULT OF DIONYSUS

Domains: Life, Madness, Nature, Trickery

Location: Greece, Anatolia, Greek colonies

Cult Secrets: Will of the gods, meaning of life, afterlife, resurrection

Dionysus is a Greek deity of intoxication, wine, hedonism, theater, grape harvest, and liberation. He is also a deity of death and rebirth, symbolic of perennial plants. Members of this cult are semi-nomadic, traveling from town to town in a great procession of revelers. Fauns and nymphs are usually found among them, instigating the revelry. This great band of drunken minstrels and dancers practically take over communities when they arrive. Their heavy drug use, loud music, and frantic dancing help the cult members attain a state of animalistic consciousness, escape the bonds of civilization, and embrace the feral nature within.

Many governments consider the cult of Dionysus dangerous since the members promote alternate political views, unusual social ideals, and deviant morals. Cult members are occasionally accused of crimes ranging from petty theft and trespassing to sexual assault and insulting the gods. A few governments have completely banned the cult while some others have restricted or limited it. The Athenian government has attempted to accept and integrate the cult with only marginal success.

THE TEMPLES

The main temple of Dionysus is on the island of Naxos in the Aegean. It is an ancient sanctuary, more than 1,200 years old. Naxos has a small city (population 10,000), also called Naxos, and two other towns of 500 people. The rest of the island is dotted with hamlets and thors.

Another significant temple to Dionysus is in Thebes. This temple is located near the Proitidian Gate and adjacent to a large theater and a temple dedicated to Dionysus' mother, Semele.

Many satellite temples exist throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. These serve as gathering sites and recruitment centers for the faithful.

Initiation. Initiation rites are held once a year in January at the main temple in Naxos and at the temple in Thebes. New members must make a pilgrimage to one of the temples to join the cult.

FESTIVALS

The festivals that honor Dionysus are outlined below. The maenads and their bands of revelers always participate in these events.

Ascolia. The people of Attica hold a great feast every autumn in honor of Dionysus. The festivities include sacrificing a goat, making a greased ball out of its skin, and playing a game with it.

Dionysia, Rural. The oldest festivals honoring Dionysus are held during the Winter Solstice. The merriment is relegated to the countryside and the rural peoples. Towns hold their celebrations on different days allowing for entertainers, priestesses, and revelers to attend multiple events. The festivals involve a parade where men exhibit phallic symbols and women carry baskets and jars. These processions are followed by competitions of drama, poetry, song, and music.

Dionysia, Urban. Three months after the Rural Dionysia, a similar but much larger festival is held in the cities, particularly in Athens, Elusia, and Thebes. These festivals last seven days and feature elaborate stage performances with famous writers and actors, bountiful prizes, and the sacrifice of a bull. The celebration concludes with a second parade of drunken revelers cavorting in the streets.

The Haloa. This women's festival celebrating Demeter and Dionysus is held after the harvest. Men are not allowed to attend, though they are expected to cover the expenses of their wives and daughters. At the festival, women engage in all sorts of hedonistic indulgences.

The Lenaia. Held in Athens each January, the Lenaia is a relatively small event that focuses on the rebirth or resurrection aspects of Dionysus. It is not open the public; only cult members and temple priestesses attend. There are contests of drama, comedy, and music followed by nocturnal cultish rites and ceremonies.

The Anthesteria. This three day festival of resurrection and rebirth is held in the spring. Social order is inverted during the festival with masters becoming slaves and slaves becoming masters. Undead rise and wander among the living during the celebration. The priestesses place wards on people's homes to protect them from these monsters, but anyone caught in the streets between sundown and



sunrise risks an encounter with the undead. On the second day of the celebration people dress in bright, cheerful outfits and engage in drinking contests. They also hold memorial observances for deceased relatives and friends. The ritual queen of the city ceremonially weds the deity as the sun sets. That night, the undead return the streets. On the third day, the undead are banished from the streets with Dionysian rites requiring tithes of food from every citizen. After the ceremony, citizens finish the day with games and sporting events.

THE MAENADS

First among Dionysus' followers are the ferocious Maenads. They are the leaders and priestesses of the cult. These women are known as "the mad ones" and dress in animal skins and antlers. They carry rods tipped with acorns and have one or more snakes crawling upon them. During rituals, the Maenads gather into frenzied mobs that tear bulls apart and pull trees from the ground. During battle, they turn this same bloodlust against their enemies, ripping armed soldiers to pieces with their bare hands.

The Gerarai. Among the Maenads are an elite group of fourteen older, wiser priestesses who take an additional oath of secrecy. These priestesses are known as Gerarai and serve as the high priestess's lieutenants and administrators. They assist the high priestess in the most important rituals.

MADNESS DOMAIN

Gods that personify chaos, ferocity, unrestraint, and delusion, such as Dionysus, Astarte, Sabazios, and Loki may grant their priestesses access to the madness domain. For some deities, madness is expressed in uninhibited carnal desire, for others it is a trip into the far reaches of consciousness and delving into alternate realities. Some of these deities promote twisted logic and sadistic humor, while others encourage gluttony and hedonism. Many followers of these gods enjoy life and want others to share in the nonsense and dark humor of existence. Others are alarmed at their divine insights and work feverishly to avert (or achieve) some esoteric, paranoid goal.

Madness Domain Spells

Priestess Level	Spells
1st	Hideous laughter , speak with animals
3rd	Enhance ability , suggestion
5th	Fear , hypnotic pattern
7th	Confusion , phantasmal killer
9th	Dominate person , modify memory

CHANNEL DIVINITY: MAD SKILLS

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you can use your Channel Divinity as an action to temporarily access hidden talents and flares of mad genius within yourself. When you call upon this ability, choose one skill or tool. You have proficiency with the chosen skill or tool for 10 minutes.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: FRENZY

Upon reaching 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity as a bonus action to enter a state of feral madness and blind ferocity.

While in a frenzy, you gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws.
- When you make a melee attack using Strength, you gain a +2 bonus to the damage roll. When you reach 10th level, this increases to +3 and when you reach 17th level it increases to +4 bonus damage to all melee attacks that use Strength.
- Your unarmed attacks inflict 1d4 damage. This increases to 1d6 at 6th level, 1d8 at 12th level, and 1d10 at 18th level.

- When you use the Attack action to make an unarmed attack, you can make a second unarmed attack as a bonus action, assuming you haven't already taken a bonus action this turn.
- You have resistance to all damage as long as you are not wearing armor.
- You can't cast spells or concentrate on them while in a frenzy.
- You cannot use any special abilities such as Channel Divinity, Destroy Undead, or Preaching while in a frenzy.
- You cannot use weapons or shields while in a frenzy.

Your frenzy lasts for 1 minute. It ends early if you are knocked unconscious. If you have nothing to attack, you can maintain the frenzy by dancing vigorously or running about. You can also end the frenzy on your turn as a bonus action.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

When you reach 6th level, your unpredictable and disturbing thoughts protect you from certain types of magic. You add your Charisma modifier to any saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

If you use your Channel Divinity while you are charmed or frightened, you make a new saving throw against the effect as a reaction.

Also, if you fail the saving throw against a [detect thoughts](#) spell, the creature probing your mind must make a Wisdom saving throw or suffer from [short term madness](#).

8TH LEVEL ABILITY

Upon reaching 8th level, your powerful and evocative persona enhances the potency of your cantrips. You add your Charisma modifier to any damage you deal with a cleric (priestess) cantrip.

GREATER RANDOM THOUGHTS

At 17th level you become so infused with the chaotic energies that you are immune to the charmed and frightened conditions.

If you fail the saving throw against a [detect thoughts](#) spell, the creature reading your mind must make a Wisdom saving throw or suffer from [long term madness](#).

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