

MONOTHEISM

Monotheism is a solitaire in-hand deck destruction game. You will help a small cadre of worshipers discover the deities in their local pantheon, and then, through the strategic use of deck manipulation, pattern building, and special abilities, trick these deities into consuming each other until only one god remains.

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COMPONENTS & SPECIFICATIONS

29 deity cards

7 double-sided worshiper cards

Single player

15-30 minutes

CREDITS

Design: Frank Brown Cloud

Art: Hand-drawn and inked by Frank Brown Cloud & Jennie Plasterer / The Vulture.

Many were painted with watercolors; some were digitally colorized with Krita.

Playtesting & Feedback: Alison Scott, Kevin Newman, Kirstin Milks, Larry Marburger, Margie Lester, Marshall Brown, Matthew Gribbins, UberDante.

SET UP

Shuffle the face-down set of god cards. All gods begin in their “veiled” state, with the cards face-down and upright, as shown in the picture below.

Add your chosen set of double-sided worshiper cards to the bottom of the deck. The worshiper card(s) should be added with their titles, shown in a small green box on the right-hand side of one face of the card, face-up and upright.



Worshiper(s) with green name plate upright and face up at the bottom of the deck.

Shuffled deck of 29 god cards, all veiled at beginning of game.

For your first few games, you should use The Haruspex of Scriptures. This “set” consists of a single double-sided card, and the game is significantly easier when using this worshiper.

As you embark on your first game of *Monotheism*, though, you should keep in mind that you are helping this beleaguered worshiper discover an entire new pantheon of gods ... while also, through trickery and cunning, ensuring that all but one of these gods eat each other! This is a difficult task, and you may find that your first attempt ends tragically.

Fear not! If you persist, I have faith that you will soon be able to aid The Haruspex of Scriptures in this quest.

Once you are more familiar with the game, you may wish to try the other sets of worshipers:

The Haruspex of Scriptures – a single worshiper

The Three Monks – The Learned Monk, The Pious Monk, & The Quiet Monk

The Autotheistic Pretender – a single worshiper

(NOTE: While using “The Autotheistic Pretender,” a game that ends with zero gods remaining counts as a victory.)

The Poet and the Spirit Guide

PLAY:

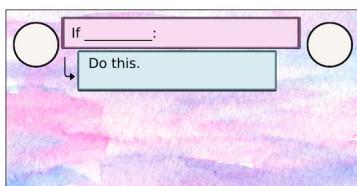
Each turn has three steps: 1.) Unveil, 2.) Act, 3.) Submerge.

1.) If the top card is a veiled god, unveil it.

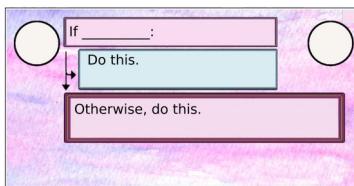
“A veiled god” means a face-down card. To “unveil it,” simply flip it over!

2.) The top card might act.

There are three types of cards, shown below:



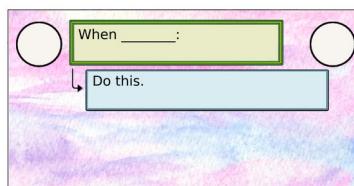
When this card is on top of the deck, it will perform an act if the condition described in the pink box is met.



This card will perform an act every time it reaches the top of the deck.

If the condition described in the top pink box is met, this card will perform the act described in the blue box.

If the condition described in the top pink box is *not* met, this card will instead perform the act described in the bottom box.



This card will never perform an act when it reaches the top of the deck.

Cards may act only at the top of the deck.

By way of contrast, a card with an “essence”, described in a green box and beginning with the word “when,” may affect the game from anywhere in the deck. This card will not act, but will always react to what is happening.

Some acts will cause gods to move through the deck, transform, or perhaps even be consumed. When this happens, a new card (or a card in a new state) might reach the top of the deck. If so, begin at step 1.) Unveil again. You will proceed to step 3.) Submerge only after the top card has acted and has remained on top of the deck in the same orientation.

3.) Submerge cards.

To submerge cards, choose either number on the top card, or the number at the upper left of the second-highest card. Move that many cards to the bottom. The card that was on top may be placed anywhere within the moving stack. If a worshiper is submerged, it is cursed. If the deck is smaller than any available number, you have lost. Pictoral examples are shown on the following pages!

When submerging cards, you may choose either number on the top card, or the left-most number on the second card.

First, choose how many cards will be submerged.



If we choose to submerge five cards, the top five are moved from the top to the bottom of the deck.



Then, shift the chosen number of cards into your other hand in order to move them to the bottom of the deck.



The card that was on top of the deck may be moved to any position within the stack of cards that is being submerged.





Once cards are moved to the bottom, the deck looks like this.

The top card is veiled, so we will unveil this card and continue playing.

The submerged cards are moved to the bottom of the deck, and play continues.



Now, the second highest card is a veiled god, which is treated as having no numbers or abilities.

When submerging cards, we will only be able to choose a number from the top card, in this case either 7 or 5.

Veiled gods are treated as having no numbers or abilities; if a veiled god is the second card, you will have fewer options when submerging.



If a worshiper is submerged, as we have to do here, then that worshiper is cursed.

Here, the curse symbol indicates that we will flip the worshiper card over.

Whenever a worshiper is submerged, that worshiper is cursed. If a worshiper is cursed too many times, they will be consumed, which may end the game in a loss.

ACTS:

You now know the essential rules for *Monotheism!* Each turn only has three steps – unveil the top card if it was veiled, then check to see if the top card will act, then submerge cards – but the complexity of the game comes from the variety of acts that the gods might undertake.

Some examples of the conditions that a god might check are shown below:

If this began unveiled:

A god with this condition will not act if it was veiled at the top of the deck this turn.

After reaching the top of the deck again, this god will act.

This is the only condition that will prevent a god from acting when it is first unveiled; other gods might act immediately after you first reveal them.

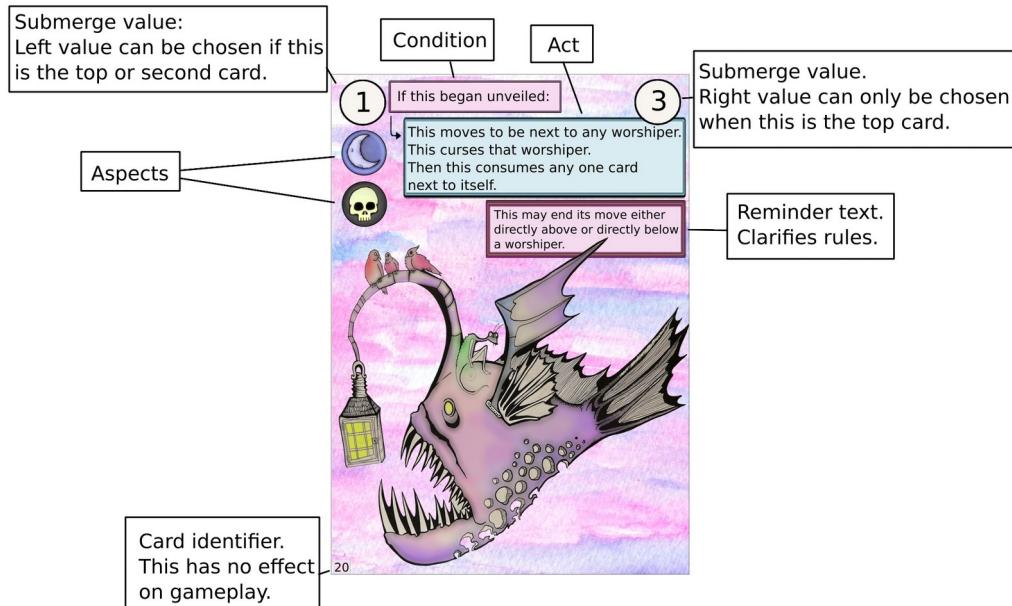
If this is next to a veiled god:

Cards will act only when they are at the top of the deck, so a card with this condition will act only if the second card in the deck is a veiled god. As stipulated above, a god with this condition will act even when first unveiled, as long as the condition is met.

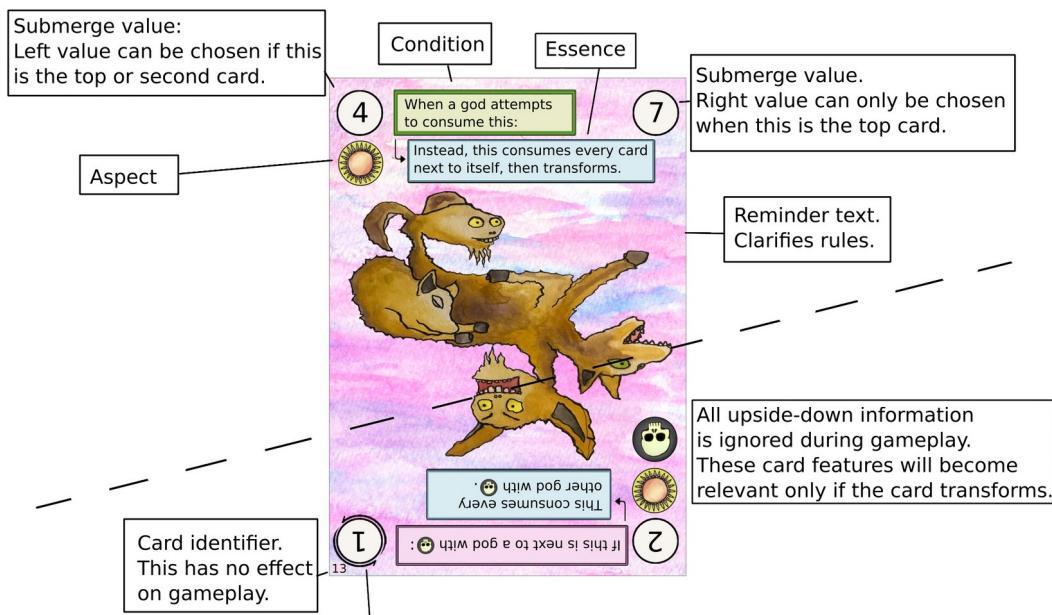
If this is next to a god with  :

This condition has a special symbol, and refers to the “aspect” of the card beneath it. To better understand this condition, we’ll look at two example cards in detail.

The following card has an act; its triggering condition is displayed in a pink box beginning with the word “if,” and it can only act when it is the top card of the deck.



This next card has an essence; its triggering condition is displayed in a green box beginning with the word “when,” and it will respond with this essence whenever the condition is met, no matter where this card is in the deck.



Of these two example cards, given identifiers #20 and #13, only card #13 has a sun aspect. If the top card of the deck had the condition, “If this is next to a god with a sun aspect,” the top card would act if card #13 were the second card, but not if card #20 were the second card.



This may consume any god from among the top four cards. If so:

Some cards have a condition that asks the player to make a choice; in this case, the player may choose to have the top card consume any god from among the top four cards. (The player will have at most three choices, because gods cannot consume themselves.) If the player chooses to do so, the top card will then act. If the player chooses not to, the top card will not act, and it will be time to submerge cards.

ESSENCES

Each card with a potential act that it can undertake – which is indicated by a pink condition box that begins with the word “if” – will be able to perform that act only if it is the top card of the deck.

Each card with an essence – which is indicated by a green condition box that begins with the word “when” – will respond no matter where it is in the deck.

When a god attempts to consume this:

A god with this condition will respond when another god attempts to consume it. The essence of a god with this condition will typically begin with the word “instead,” indicated that the god will *not* be consumed. However, this essence only triggers when a god attempts to consume this; the void is not a god, and this essence will not trigger if this god is consumed by the void.

When this is consumed:

A god with this condition will respond whenever it is consumed and removed from the deck. Note that this essence will effect the world whether this god is consumed by another god or by the void. However, this condition is only present on card, #7, which then causes every card above it to be consumed by the void. When this happens, you don’t need to check the essences of the other cards being consumed, because no other cards have conditions that trigger when they are consumed by the void.

When this consumes one or more gods:

A god with this condition does not normally have the power to consume other gods; its essence will trigger if it is granted the ability to consume gods by something else. If this consumes multiple gods at the same time – perhaps because it was granted the power to consume everything next to itself – this essence will trigger only a single time, and will not trigger again until the next occasion on which this is granted the ability to consume gods.

When this is unveiled:

A god with an essence can effect the game no matter where it is, including when it is at the top of the deck. This condition will typically be met because this card had reached the top of the deck and is unveiled in the first step of a turn.

VEILED GODS

A god that is veiled is treated as having no printed numbers or abilities. It is still a god, however, and can be affected by anything that affects gods.

Unless otherwise instructed, you may not look at the other side of a veiled god, even if it is consumed. When a veiled god is consumed, move this card to your stack of cards that have been removed from the game without looking at it.

Even if you happen to know the actual identity of a veiled god – perhaps because an act allowed you to peek at it, or an act caused a previously unveiled god to become veiled again – if it is consumed while it is veiled, it is treated as having no printed abilities. (For example, if a certain god causes something to happen when it is consumed, but this god is consumed while veiled, the event that it would've caused *will not* happen.)

CONSUMING GODS

Gods may be consumed in two ways: a god may be consumed by another god, or a god may be consumed by the void. The void is not a god. I'm not quite sure what it is. All that seems clear so far is that the void is where gods reside, and the void hungers.

Some gods consume others when they act; these gods typically have a death aspect, indicated with a hominin skull.

Other gods act in ways that grant the power to consume. A god may grant this power to itself. Additionally, this power persists until the intended set of gods is consumed, even if god that granted this power is itself consumed (which may occur if the top card grants the second card the power to consume all cards next to itself).

Gods cannot consume themselves. If the top card is a god that may consume something from among the top four cards, you must choose a card from the three cards beneath it. However, a god can be consumed after it has granted another god the power to consume something. For example, if the top card is a god that grants any god from among the top four cards the power to consume everything next to itself, then the top card will be consumed if this power is granted to the second card.

If a card is itself consumed while attempting to act, its act will cease. After being consumed, a card can no longer effect the world. (As mentioned above, if a card has granted a god the power to consume others, that power does not immediately dissipate if the granting card is consumed. But if the god that has been *granted* the power to consume others is itself consumed midway through its attempted meal, its meal will cease, as the god will be gone.)

TIMING

Occasionally, a god will consume several cards as a result of a single act. When this happens, the cards to be consumed are first chosen, then the cards are consumed one at a time, in the following order:

1.) The nearest card is consumed first.

If cards are being consumed by a god at the top of the deck, the highest card is consumed first. If cards are being consumed by a god at the bottom of the deck, the lowest card is consumed first. If cards are being consumed by a god in the middle of the deck, measure distance based on the number of cards between that god and the card that is being consumed.

2.) If multiple cards are equally near, the top card is consumed first.

If a god in the middle of the deck is consuming every card next to itself, it will first consume the card above it (closer to the top of the deck), then the card below itself.

If other game effects trigger in the middle of an act, resolve the new effect before continuing to carry out the original action. For example, if a god undertakes an act that states “This consumes the four cards nearest itself,” and it is next to a god with an essence that states “If a god attempts to consume this, the bottom three cards are consumed by the void instead,” then the bottom three cards will be consumed, four times in a row, for a total of twelve cards removed from the bottom of the deck.

Alternatively, if it were next to a god with an essence that states “If a god attempts to consume this, consume that god instead,” you would resolve this new effect first, causing the top card to be consumed.

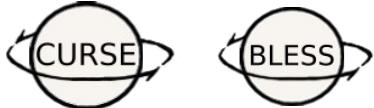
Because the cards are chosen before any are consumed, a god that will consume two cards from among the top four cards *may not* consume the fifth card down in the deck, even though this will be among the top four cards after a card is consumed.

WORSHIPERS

Worshipers are added to the deck only in predefined sets. Two of these sets – “The Haruspex of Scriptures” and “The Autotheistic Pretender” – consist of only a single card. “The Poet and The Spirit Guide,” inspired by the journey of Dante and Virgil, includes two cards. “The Three Monks,” inspired by the three wise monkeys, includes three cards.

Worshipers are not gods. If a card can grant a god the power to consume cards, that power cannot be granted to a worshiper. Worshipers can be consumed by gods or by the void, in which case they are removed from the game. If the final worshiper (or the only worshiper) is consumed, you have lost.

Worshipers can also be cursed or blessed. When this happens, check the symbols at the side of the worshiper to determine what should be done with the card.



These symbols indicate that the card is flipped over if it is cursed or blessed, respectively.



These symbols indicate that the card is rotated if it is cursed or blessed.

Whenever a worshiper is submerged, whether the worshiper was submerged because it had reached the top of the deck, or because the worshiper was near enough to the top card that it was a part of the stack that is moved to the bottom, the worshiper is cursed. At times, two or more worshipers may be submerged together; both will be cursed, but you will resolve the curse for the top card first.

ENDING THE GAME

After the top card has completed an act, you may check whether you have won the game. If only one god remains, and you still have at least one worshiper left in the deck, you win!

Note, though, that you won't win until after the current act has finished. If, for example, there are only five cards left in the deck, your worshiper is the bottom card, and the top card undertakes an act in which it will consume the four cards beneath itself, you will *not* win when the three gods above your worshiper have been consumed. Instead, the top card will continue munching away and consume your worshiper before you can check for victory; you will have lost.

Losing the game is rather easier than winning. You should feel free to check to see whether you have lost at any time! You have lost if your final worshiper has been consumed. You also will have lost if you ever have to choose a number of cards to submerge that is greater than the number remaining in the deck – in this case, all remaining cards will be consumed by the void, including your final worshiper.

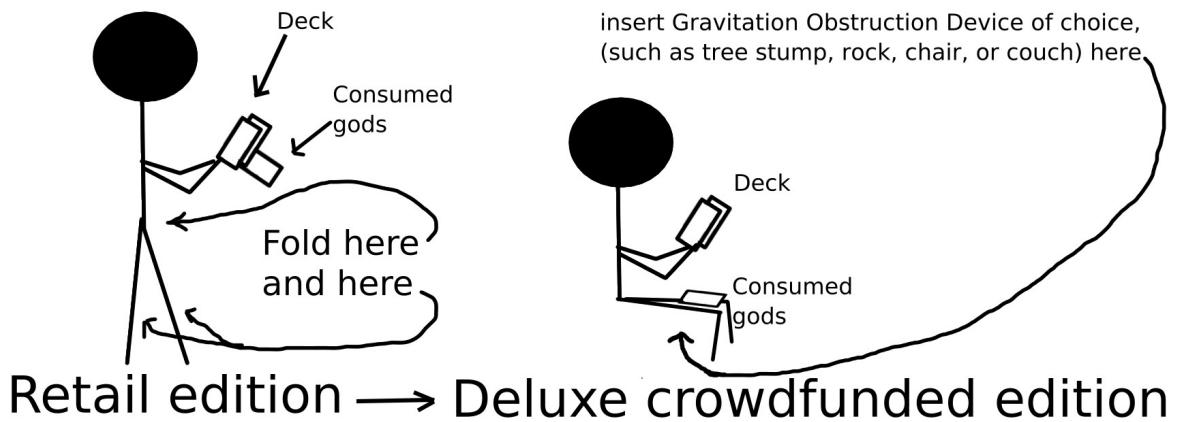
In rare cases, it may be possible to reach a state in which all the remaining gods have been unveiled, none are able to consume each other, and your worshiper is able to avoid being cursed (which will usually happen each time your worshiper is submerged, but some worshipers have wily ways of moving to the bottom of the deck without being submerged). In this case, unfortunately, you have also lost. Each worshiper really wants to achieve monotheism, and you have to help them do it. Next time, I hope you find some way to deal with those pesky deities.

PLAYING IN-HAND

Monotheism was designed to be played entirely in-hand. When a card is consumed, turn it perpendicular to the others and hold it behind the deck for the rest of the game.



In addition to this standard in-hand version, however, particularly wealthy players will be given the opportunity to upgrade their game to a premium edition, like so:



DEALING WITH THE DESIGNER'S MISTAKES

I have played through the game many times, and I believe that the rules described above will help you identify a unique outcome that should occur in each situation in the game, even though there are *many* possible interactions between all these strange deities. Possibly, though, you will find the rules or card text to be insufficiently clear. If so, please resolve things in a way that you think is reasonable, and just be consistent. But also, I'd be thrilled if you'd let me know, and I will try to either explain what should have happened, or make the wording better for future iterations of this rulebook!

Indeed, I'd love to hear any and all thoughts. You can write to me at fcbrowncloud@protonmail.com. I also have a section about game design on my website at frankbrowncloud.com.

Thanks for playing, and I hope you have at least a *bit* of fun with the little puzzles that appear during the game :)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Above: Closer to the top of the deck.

Began: Was in its current state as soon as it reached the top of the deck. For example, if an ability says “If this began unveiled,” this ability will typically occur only upon the second time that the card reaches the top of the deck, because it will not happen if the card was veiled (face-down) when it reached the top of the deck.

Blessed: Only worshipers can be blessed. When a worshiper is blessed, its card is either rotated or flipped over, depending on the symbol shown.

Bottom: The position in the deck farthest from the top (visible) card.

Bottom #: The set of # cards that are all farthest from the top of the deck.

Card: Either a god or worshiper. Any abilities which specify that they only affect either gods or worshipers will not affect the other type of card. Any abilities that specify that they affect “cards” can have an effect on either gods and worshipers.

Consume: Both gods and the void are able to consume cards. When a card is consumed, it is removed from the game and has no further effect on play. Gods are not able to consume themselves; each god can only consume other cards.

Cursed: Only worshipers can be cursed. Worshipers are cursed whenever they are submerged; additionally, they might be cursed by the abilities of some gods. When a worshiper is cursed, its card is either rotated, flipped over, or consumed by the void (removed from the game entirely), depending on the symbol shown. If the last worshiper is consumed, you have lost the game.

Down: Toward the bottom of the deck.

Next to: When text refers to cards that are “next to” something, there must be no other cards in between. In the world of Monotheism, spacetime is not curved: the top and bottom cards of the deck are each next to only one other card. The top and bottom cards are not next to each other.

Submerge: After resolving the ability of each card that has reached the top of the deck during a turn, you must submerge a set of cards. Choose either number printed on the top card, or the left-most number printed on the next card (if the next card is a veiled god, it is treated as having no numbers printed on it, so you may only choose one of the two numbers on the top card). Take that many cards from the top of the deck, keeping their order and orientation constant, with one exception: the card that was on top of the deck may be placed anywhere within this stack of cards. Each god that was veiled remains veiled; each god that was unveiled remains unveiled; each

god that has upside-down text stays in the same orientation. For example, if the top four cards of the deck were DCBA, with A as the top card, and you have chosen to submerge four cards, then these may be moved to the bottom in the order ADCB, DACB, DCAB, or DCBA. If you attempt to submerge more cards than currently remain in the deck, those cards are all consumed by the void (which ends the game in a loss, because no worshipers will remain).

Submerged: Whenever you submerge cards, each card within the top #, where # is the number of cards selected to submerge, has been “submerged.” This is true even if the cards were not physically moved, which might happen near the end of the game; for example, if there were only four cards remaining in the deck, and you choose to submerge 4 cards, then all four cards have been submerged, even if they are kept in the exact same order. Note that whenever a worshiper is submerged, it is cursed, even if the physical card did not need to be moved.

Top #: The set of # cards at the top of the deck.

Transformed: Rotated so that the text that was previously upside-down is now right-side up. During play, all text, numbers, and symbols that are upside-down are ignored and have no effect on play.

Unveiled: This card is face-up. Only gods can be unveiled, not worshipers. An unveiled god may be glanced at no matter where it is in the deck (as long as all cards are kept in the same order). An unveiled god with a conditional ability printed in a green box might affect the game even when it is not the top card of the deck, perhaps because it has an ability that triggers if another card allows it to consume something, or because it has an ability that triggers when something tries to consume it. An unveiled god with an ability printed in a pink box will be able to use its ability only when it is at the top of the deck. Unless otherwise instructed, the only way for a god to become unveiled is by reaching the top position of the deck.

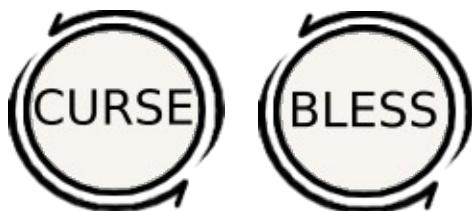
Veiled: This card is face-down. Only gods can be veiled, not worshipers. A veiled god is still a god, but it is treated as a god with no abilities, no aspects, and no printed numbers. A veiled god is able to consume other gods if another card causes it to do so. Unless otherwise instructed, you cannot look at the other side of the card to learn the identity of a veiled god. When a veiled god is consumed, its own abilities cannot trigger (as a veiled god is treated as having no abilities).

Void: The void surrounds the plane of existence that these gods and worshipers exist within. If a god or worshiper is consumed by “the void,” no god has consumed that card (and so no abilities that specify “When this consumes another god” or “When a god attempts to consume this” will occur). When a card is consumed, no matter whether that card is consumed by a god or by the void, the card is moved to the same set of consumed cards and will have no further effect on play.

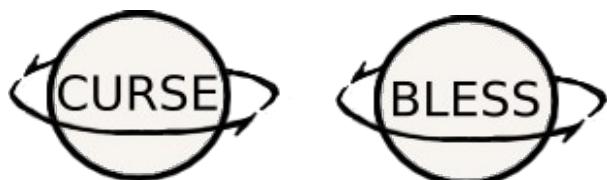
GLOSSARY OF SYMBOLS:



When cursed, this card is consumed by the void.



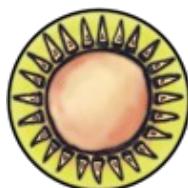
When cursed (or blessed), this card is rotated.



When cursed (or blessed), this card is flipped over.



This aspect indicates that a god can consume other cards with relatively little assistance. Some gods may behave differently if they are next to a god with this aspect.



This aspect indicates that a god has a solar alignment. Many gods behave differently if they are next to a god with this aspect.



This aspect indicates that a god has a lunar alignment. Many gods behave differently if they are next to a god with this aspect.

SCENARIOS:

In a full game of Monotheism, you'll be helping your chosen worshiper(s) in a quest to both discover the gods in the local pantheon, and then to trick those gods into consuming each other. Although a small fraction of games are un-winnable (for example, you might have the misfortune to unveil god #21 three times during your first cycle through the deck, which is likely to happen once every five hundred games or so) the vast majority of games can be won while you're helping The Haruspex of Scriptures, and most games can be won while helping the other worshipers.

If you're having difficulty, though, you might want to consult the advice section in the following pages.

After you've gained some familiarity with the cards in the deck, you may also wish to work through some of the five-minute puzzle scenarios presented below. Each such puzzle has at least one sequence of moves that will result in victory, and I thought that these situations were interesting when they arose in my games.

Unless otherwise noted, each card in the scenario should be added to the deck unveiled and in its starting orientation. The top card is veiled in each scenario, so you will begin by unveiling it on your first turn.

SCENARIO #1: Wrath of the Cherubim. 11 cards.

BOTTOM – #01 – #09 – #10 – #28 – #16 – #20 – (The Autotheistic Pretender, cursed three times) – #29 – #14 – #27 – (#11, veiled) – TOP



SCENARIO #2: A Friendly Game of Leap-frog. 9 cards.

BOTTOM – #08 – #13 – #18 – #23 – #10 – Mizaru, The Learned Monk – #01 – #28 – (#02, veiled) – TOP



SCENARIO #3: When Atlas Falls. 11 cards.

BOTTOM – #09 – #01 – #24 – #19 – #07 – #04 – #26 – #25 – #10 – (Iwazaru, The Quiet Monk, cursed once) – (#20, veiled) – TOP



SCENARIO #4: Awakening an Endless Hunger. 11 cards.

BOTTOM -- #27 – #02 – #09 – #01 – #26 – #24 – #05 – (Kikazaru, The Pious Monk, cursed once) – #18 – (#23, transformed) – (#12, veiled) – TOP



SCENARIO #5: A Light in the Dark Depths. 11 cards.

BOTTOM – (The Autotheist Pretender, cursed twice) – #03 – #18 – #01 – #24 – #26 – #20 – #23 – #08 – #29 – (#28, veiled) – TOP

A game that ends with zero gods remaining is a victory for The Autotheistic Pretender.



ADVICE

Monotheism is intended to be a tricky game! My goal while designing was to create something that I could win about half the time if I played quickly. And yet, I'm not terribly fond of losing games due to the capricious whims of fate. The vast majority of games of Monotheism can be won while utilizing only the revealed information.

I think the biggest piece of advice that I can give, if you're finding that you often lose after being cursed by card #21 too many times, is that you should try to stop unveiling new gods a little sooner. As you unveil more and more cards, you have a greater likelihood of either being cursed by card #21 (which always curses your worshiper when it's unveiled), being cursed by cards #18 & #25 (which curse your worshiper if too much of the deck has been unveiled by the time you find them), or simply unveiling more cards that will make your worshiper's task difficult, like cards #7, #9, #13, & #22. As soon as you've encountered a set of gods that might plausibly consume all the others before your worshipers have been submerged too many times, you might want to avoid interacting with any more of the pantheon.

You can typically avoid unveiling new deities by positioning gods such that their numbers will allow you to bring a god that is already unveiled to the top each time you submerge cards. Presumably, though, some number of gods will be consumed as you cycle through the deck, so you should keep this in mind as you choose which position the card that was on top should be placed into while you are submerging cards.

This counting trick is particularly helpful to use with gods that are near your worshipers; you will often want to bring worshipers to the top of the deck. As an example, imagine unveiling a god with the numbers 5 and 4 that is seven cards away from your worshiper; when you submerge cards, you might want to move the top card down two positions, so that in the future it will be only five cards away from your worshiper, and can bring the worshiper to the top when it submerges cards.

Also, many different gods can plausibly contribute to a winning strategy. I've tried to include several different combinations in the above scenarios, so perhaps these will give you some insights into what sort of plan you might seek in future games.

Really, though, I mostly hope that you're having fun! And if the rules as written are leading to frustration, please change them! Two changes you might consider to make the game easier would be to bless your worshiper at the beginning of the game, or, as a really drastic measure, perhaps even to remove card #21 from the deck. That card was included for a reason, sure, but none of my pedantic theories about game design or decision spaces matter as much as whether you're having fun :)