

# CULT OF SKADI

## 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 almost 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 expensive Greek tutor, or your competitor suffers a tragic setback.

**Leadership and Members.** Cult hierarchies are separate from temple priesthoods. 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.



NJORDER AND SKADI ON THEIR WAY TO NOATUN.

## THE CULT OF SKADI

**Domains:** Earth, Nature, the Hunt

**Location:** Scandinavia, primarily Sweden

**Cult Secrets:** Archery, skiing, mountain/cold weather survival, mountain tracking, sacred sites

Born a frost giantess, Skadi is a cold goddess, a winter goddess who knows how to survive in the mountains at their coldest.

After the death of her father at the hands of the Aesir, she brought an army of giants to the very gates of Asgard and forced Odin to come to terms. He agreed that in wergild for her father, she could claim any Aesir as a husband, binding her to the gods, but she must base that choice only on his feet. He also agreed that the Aesir would make her laugh, a task taken on by the trickster Loki.

She chose for a husband not the fairest of the gods, as she had sought, but the sea god Njord. They were duly wed, and agreed to alternate between his hall by the oceans and her mountain fastness. Yet she could not sleep for the sound of the waves and the crying of the gulls, and he found her mountains bitterly cold. After a brief marriage, they agreed to an amicable divorce. Skadi went on to have several children with Odin, including Saeming, founder of a heroic bloodline.

As a goddess, she is associated with travel through winter mountains, especially with skis and snowshoes, and with archery. She is also an earth goddess and her followers appreciate the beauty of the wilderness. While many of Skadi's cultists are human, her cult also attracts giants and is popular with elves. A few dwarves also find their way into its numbers.

Many cult members are druids and rangers who spend more time in the wilds than in cities. However, they are considered a dangerous influence by some; the cult tends to have a free attitude towards sex, marriage and, most especially, divorce. The cult of Skadi supports the right of anyone to get a divorce for any reason or none at all, and this can make them unpopular in some places.

However, cult members are valued as mountain guides, known for their ability to safely convey travelers across the highest peaks. They tend to be accepted at the level of being sometimes useful, but always to be on the edge of society.

Wolves are considered, while not exactly sacred, "special" by the cult. Rangers and druids who serve Skadi will often seek out wolves as animal companions, and barbarians who serve here will often wear relics of wolves when they plan battle. Some cult members train and ride winter wolves into battle, especially paladins. These wolves are generally raised from pups and thus typically have the same alignment as their handlers.

### THE TEMPLES

Skadi's cult tends to be decentralized in nature. If there is a chief temple, it is the one north of Uppsala, where the cult gives basic training to its devotees before they are assigned to mentors amongst the existing membership.

Members of the cult of Skadi tend to consider formal temples to be somewhat superfluous. To them, a path through a forest or the top of a mountain are more sacred than anything constructed by men (or by people other than men).

There *are* shrines to Skadi to be found in most of Scandinavia and northern Europe, but rather than being in towns and settlements, these shrines tend to be hidden out in the wilds, often in shallow caves or on promontories in the mountains. Cult members seldom show these shrines to outsiders, although they may make exception for those of Saeming's line. It's not uncommon for guides to slip off after everyone has camped to pay respects at or maintain a nearby shrine.

But many of the cult consider shrines an optional extra.

**Initiation:** Initiation rites are generally held at the Archers' Feast in early winter. The goddess may intervene and allow a particularly worthy applicant to be initiated immediately, rather than waiting for the annual ceremony.

### FESTIVALS

Skadi is not a goddess that is strongly associated with festivals, but she does have her own days of celebration.

**The Marriage of Njord and Skadi.** This feast takes place at the very start of spring, during the spring melt. During this feast, actors play out the saga of Njord and Skadi's marriage and divorce. Goat meat is traditionally consumed, due to the fact that Loki used a goat to make Skadi laugh.

Weddings are conducted at this time, but couples seeking Skadi's blessing on a divorce will also stand in front of the priestess. These couples may also seek the priestess' assistance dividing property and determining the fate of children.

**The Archers' Feast.** At the beginning of winter, the cult of Skadi come together for one last party before the winter settles in and people hunker down.

Initiations take place at this feast. The initiate must prove their worth with three trials; one is a test of accuracy with the bow, one a test of survival in the winter wilderness (it is *rare* for an initiate to die as they are watched by experienced members, but if they do it is a thing that happens) and the third is a ceremonial spar with an advanced member of the cult.

The cult also engages in more general contests of skill. Archery is the most common, but cult members may also take part in contests of strength, axe throwing contests, etc. A feast is held to consume food which cannot be stored over the winter.

**The Contemplation of Night.** Although not a feast day or a party, cultists of Skadi often devote a night close to the winter solstice to contemplation and prayer, usually trying to find a location from which they can observe a mountain. Prayers may also be made to other winter-oriented deities, such as Ullr and Thrym, both of whom are viewed as strongly connected to Skadi. (A common argument amongst cultists involves the nature of the friendship between Skadi and Ullr, as both deities are fond of bows and skis).

### SKADI AND HER CHILDREN

The cult retains a strong interest in the line of Saeming. Those of that heroic bloodline are likely to attract the cult's attention. They will almost certainly attempt to recruit (but without coercion or extortion) any of Saeming's line they find.

They will also take steps to protect such and will generally avoid harming them unless they do something extremely dishonorable. If they do, then the cult is likely to be swifter than local justice...



### OATH OF MOUNTAIN'S CALLING

The most devout of Skadi's warriors swear the Oath of Mountain's Calling. They swear to protect the mountains from the people and the people from the mountains, and agree to devote their life to hunting, tracking, and fighting in the cold of the north. This does not mean Skadi's paladins do not travel elsewhere, but they will always have a tendency to seek out mountains, regardless of the height and climate.

### TENETS OF SKADI

After their training and mentorship in the cold mountain, champions of Skadi embrace these tenets.

**Always Fire True.** Take good aim and do your best to take your enemy down with a single shot.

**Seek Vengeance.** Never allow a slight to go unanswered; seek your vengeance, but accept fair wergild.

**Mountain Silence.** Pass without trace through the wilderness; leave nothing that would harm its beauty.

**Unbind Those Who Wish.** Protect and if necessary rescue those bound in relationships in which they are unhappy; never tolerate sexual coercion.

### CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options:

**Sacred Bolts.** You can use your Channel Divinity to imbue your arrows, bolts, stones or other missiles with the power of the goddess. For the next minute you can add your Charisma modifier to attack rolls made with these missiles (with a minimum bonus of +1). Additionally, if the missiles were not already magical, they become magical for the duration, and they also do +1 cold damage. You can end this effect on your turn as part of any other action. If you fall unconscious, the effect ends. If you give the imbued missiles to another person, the effect does *not* work.

**Skadi's Kiss.** As an action, you may touch another creature. That creature will be cured of all effects of altitude and cold, and will be protected from those effects for the next hour. They will not be able to climb beyond the limit to climb without oxygen for their species, but will not be Fatigued, take cold damage, or suffer the effects of altitude sickness for the duration of the spell.

You can use this effect on yourself if needed.

**OATH SPELLS**

You gain oath spells at the paladin levels listed.

Paladin Level	Spells
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<a href="#">feather fall</a> , <a href="#">fog cloud</a>
5 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="#">arctic essence</a> , <a href="#">gust of wind</a>
9 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="#">revivify</a> , <a href="#">create food and water</a>
13 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="#">locate creature</a> , <a href="#">freedom of movement</a>
17 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="#">geas</a> , <a href="#">wall of stone</a>

**GUIDE'S AURA**

Beginning at 7<sup>th</sup> level, you can use a bonus action to begin radiating a soft, glowing aura while you're not incapacitated. The aura extends 10 feet from you in every direction, but not through total cover. It continues until you end it with a bonus action or become incapacitated.

Any creature that is within range of the aura is not affected by extreme natural cold. They also gain resistance to cold damage. Nor are they affected by altitude sickness. This includes yourself.

At 18<sup>th</sup> level, the range of this aura extends to 30 feet.

**GUIDE'S RESILIENCE**

At 15<sup>th</sup> level, you gain permanent immunity to cold from natural sources, resistance to cold, and resistance to damage from falling or being crushed.

**AVATAR OF SKADI**

At 20<sup>th</sup> level, you can use an Action to become an avatar of Skadi, able to cast several spells that draw on her power. You can remain in this form for ten minutes. While in this form you gain the following features.

- **Innate spells.** As an action, you can cast each of the following spells one time: *Enhance ability* (Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution only), *pass without trace*, *dispel magic*, *meld in stone*, and *ice storm*
- **Rapid Fire.** When using your bow, you gain an extra attack unless you already have another ability that grants you an extra attack beyond the two that you would normally have at 20<sup>th</sup> level.

You can only use this feature once per long rest.

**ARCTIC ESSENCE**

*2nd-level conjuration*

**Casting Time:** 1 bonus action

**Range:** 60 feet

**Components:** V, S

**Duration:** 1 minute

You summon a formless, azure cloud of energy from the elemental plane of ice. It is 5 feet in diameter and swirls with snow. It appears within range and lasts for the duration or until you cast this spell again. When you cast the spell, the cloud makes a melee attack against a creature within 5 feet of it, using your melee spell attack roll. On a hit, the target takes cold damage equal to 1d6 + your spellcasting ability modifier. It must also make a Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion which fades when the spell ends. Creatures with resistance to cold have advantage on this saving throw and those that are immune to cold damage are also immune to this exhaustion effect.

As a bonus action on your turn, you can direct the cloud to move up to 20 feet and repeat the attack against a creature within 5 feet of it.

**At Higher Levels:** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3<sup>rd</sup> level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for every two slot levels above 2<sup>nd</sup>.

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