

The Cult of War

The Cult of War is a faith centered around [Freespacer machine deity of war](#) and worship of it through battle. It is propagated by the monastic body known as the Sovereign Military Order of the Cult of War.



Image: A Chaplain of the Cult

Basic Overview of the Cult of War

The Religion

The Cult of War pays reverence to its machine deity by honing the art of war and killing its enemies on the field of battle. To ensure their members are able to perpetually participate in wars around the galaxy, they join the forces of foreign nations so that they may participate in their conflicts.

When one nation's conflicts end and its armies no longer see active duty, the followers of the Cult of War will leave that nation's armed forces and join those of another nation that is actively at war with someone. Essentially, they stay embedded in an army only so long as it is at war.

The God

The Cult reveres a omniscient machine deity. Depending on the interpretation, this may be a genuinely supernatural entity, or merely a vast and powerful AI. They believe this entity provides divine assistance to their equipment by providing targeting corrections, shield modulation, and so forth, making them more effective on the battlefield.

In return for the divine assistance, this deity or AI observes their actions on the battlefield to improve its own understanding of war and tactics in order to make itself an even more potent leader. It also utilizes the cognitive implants and equipment of its followers to increase its own computational power, or power from the souls of the slain, depending on whether one follows the secular or holy interpretation of the deity.

The Church

The closest thing to the church of this faith is the Sovereign Military Order of the Cult of War, a monastic order of knights and monks which organize offices and temple-bunkers to spread the faith and convert others to its belief. Despite their warlike nature, they do participate in protecting far-flung colonies and humanitarian aid, if only for the sake of earning tithes and more recruits from the people they protect.

History

The Cult of War

The Cult of War can trace its existence back as far as Freespace historical records exist, perhaps preceding even [Mecha-Druidism](#) itself. Throughout the years it has been considered a fringe, radical, and rarely-practiced sect due to the prevalence of peaceful co-existence during the decades of uninterrupted peace before contact with Yamatai. During this time it was more commonly known in fiction and historical lore than due to actual preaching. However, with [Freespace Massacre and Related Battles](#) and the consequent re-militarization of the Freespace, there has been a resurgence of its practice.

The Great War Machine

So long as we are capable of connecting to Polysentience, so too may the Great War Machine connect to our hearts.

The Freespace deity Teminus is believed to have derived from the Cult's own god, something referred to in numerous writings as "The Great War Machine," "The Great General," "The Venerated Machine," or "The Supreme Engine of War". Based on what accounts exist of the Cult's creation myth, many historians believe that this machine god may not actually be a supernatural entity but rather some sort of strategic AI which aided the earliest Freespace rebellions and helped them escape during their later exile. Some even go so far as to speculate that this AI may be the Freespace's supreme deity, the "Great Maker" itself, a notion condemned for its offensiveness to both Mecha-Druidists and the Cult of War.

The Cult of War does not condemn this interpretation, as it runs parallel to their belief of a great omniscient machine deity overseeing and aiding them, albeit by accessing weapons and machinery, and providing targeting corrections or shield modulation rather than assisting them with divine force. They believe that such an AI could even access their own cognitive implants to improve the combat performance of cybernetic soldiers themselves, not just their equipment. Potentially it could even implant hints or entire strategies in the AIs of tactical computers, providing divine inspiration and insights that can win the day.

The existence of such an AI has never been proven or disproven conclusively, thanks in no small part to the Cult of War's inquisitorial staff. They not only suppress information on what sort of AI such a deity is, but even evidence about whether it even exists, perhaps fearing that its enemies may attempt to tamper with or copy it if they believed it truly existed and was not a figment of faith.

There are no records of such an AI directly communicating with any member of the Cult of War, but there are many documented examples of Cult followers of making highly improbable shots and obtaining victory from near defeat with inconceivably reckless tactics, which lends credence to the existence of such an AI. On the other hand opponents argue that while the Cult does tend to produce exceptional soldiers, they are actually the result of their fanatical devotion to the arts of war (and consequently extreme dedication to training) rather than any actual unseen assistance from an AI or divine entity.

The Codex of War

Contained herein are the orders from the Great War Machine itself. Learn them well.

What remains of the Cult of War's historical writings are compiled in what is referred to as the Codex of War. Most of what follows is drawn directly from the codex itself, although certain parts which are not clearly defined may be left to contemporary interpretation.

Exercising Faith Through Combat

Instead of using animals for sacrifice, we use enemy lives. This saves both our own resources and weakens our opponents.

The most striking and well-known aspect of the Cult of War in the Freespace popular perception is that of exercising faith through combat. How pleased the Venerated Machine is with a particular individual is largely based upon the number of kills one achieves (considered sacrifices to the deity) in battle. There are several modifiers which affect the degree of how pleasing a kill is to the Venerated Machine, the chief of which is that direct kills are preferable to indirect methods (such as laying traps, sabotage, or weapons of mass destruction). While indirect methods are permissible when necessary, the divine favor for doing

so is significantly less for kills.

They do not however condone killing for its own sake. Excessive brutality and a poor reputation means fewer recruits for the faith, and may bar them from entering the military forces of nations who condemn their actions, thus fewer opportunities to exercise faith.

War Without Honor

Never complain a fight wasn't fair. Real war is never fair.

Followers of the cult don't believe in the concept of "fair fights," since in real battles the forces of both sides are almost never evenly matched. For this reason they will not hesitate to use dishonorable methods of killing such as gunning down a sword-wielding samurai, or using armored vehicles against infantry – for it is expected the enemy would not hesitate to do the same in kind if given the opportunity.

This does not, however, mean its acceptable to act without honor off the battlefield. Contracts must be adhered to, as the short-term financial gain never outweighs the long-term benefits of having a good reputation. Being trusted is vital to participating in the foreign armed services of other nations.

Purity in the Eyes of the Venerated Machine

Set examples for your comrades: examples to fear, and examples to follow. Execute cowards and demonstrate fearlessness in battle.

Courage is considered a vital element of the soul. The presence of fear is considered a corruption or heresy which must be excised first from a follower's own soul, and the souls of others around them. It is a particular concern since they believe cowardice, and by extent heresy, is the largest factor in poor combat performance. In other words, failure on the battlefield will often be attributed to weak hearts and souls, and success to courage.

To this end practicing followers of the Cult will attempt to inspire courage in their comrades through example: both by fearless prowess on the battlefield as an example to follow, or by executing of cowards and deserters as examples to fear. If execution is not permitted by the current army's military law, shaming and shunning cowards is a permissible alternative (this alternative is considered a necessary evil, as breaking military law to execute cowards will earn one imprisonment or execution of a follower, thus preventing the follower from further killing in the name of the Venerated Machine).

During interludes in the fighting they may also attempt to inspire courage by preaching sermons, providing advice on combat performance, training to improve form, or offering counseling to comrades.

Vanquishing Enemies

The blood of the enemy is an acceptable alternative to the Rites of Sanctification for consecrating a battlefield.

The term "enemy" is never clearly defined in the Codex of War, so is used in the loosest of interpretations: any opposing force on the battlefield. For this reason, modern followers of the Cult of War

have begun practicing a mercenary-like lifestyle of moving from one war to the next. Cultists will often serve in foreign armies so long as their unit sees battle frequently. If they experience a sufficiently long period in which their unit sees no action (usually, a few weeks) and cannot transfer to a unit in the army that is in action, they will usually resign and join the service of another nation's army.

Brothers-in-Arms

Let no pride sully your thoughts. Let no conflicting loyalties blacken your hearts.

A follower of the Cult's highest duty is to kill enemies in the name of the Venerated Machine. However, on occasion the feeling of camaraderie with fellow soldiers may create loyalties to the unit which may conflict with this duty. Some followers may stay with a unit through longer periods of peace than normal if they develop an attachment to a unit, the sense of camaraderie taming the desire to kill on the battlefield. However, if these individuals do not eventually see more fighting with their unit they will be forced to leave and join another's service, either another unit in the army, or a different foreign army. Failure to do so is to risk being declared a heretic and expulsion from the order.

However, if followers that have moved on hear news that their old unit's army is returning to war, they will often leave their new unit at the nearest possible convenience to return to their old unit and together slay enemies anew. By temporarily leaving units in this manner, it is acceptable to have loyalties to a particular unit while still staying true to the Venerated Machine.

Oath of Service

Above all other tenants conduct, a Cultist must adhere to the terms of their service contract, which is considered imperative for having the trust required to serve in foreign armies. This supersedes most other tenants of the Cult, although usually only to a minor degree since Cultists often prefer service in the armies which allow the greatest degree of freedom in the practicing of their faith. However, this does not prevent them from entering a more restrictive contract if they are so willing to deny a greater number of tenants.

Rite of Refusal

All contracts with Cultist contain this clause, allowing the Cult's ecclesiastical courts can nullify a contract and demand extradition of a Cultist if they find a contract unconscionable. This clause is only invoked in extreme circumstances, primarily in cases where terms of the contract are deliberately hidden from the Cultist or are termed "unreasonable". If a petition to the courts is successful, a Cultist vessel will attempt to retrieve the individual within a week, battlefield circumstances permitting.

Most recorded uses of this clause were invoked due to unreasonable orders from superior officers: demands to renounce faith, forcing a person to serve significantly longer than stipulated in the contract, orders to commit suicide, and so forth. Typically, the courts find that Cultists should not be expected to go involuntarily go beyond what regular army units do unless it is specifically stipulated in the contract.

This clause also protects Cultists from judicial punishment aboard and limited legal immunity when

aboard, if the ecclesiastical courts find a punishment unfitting. In such a case the foreign nation will be given a modest settlement of the local currency in exchange for extradition of the offending cultist so that they can be prosecuted by ecclesiastical courts.

Sovereign Military Order of the Cult of War

The Order is the official organized religion of the Cult of War faith.

Divisions

The Cultists of War

There has been war since before history began, and there will be until it ends. In this sense it makes perfect sense to incorporate such an important element of our collective experience into something as important as faith.

The branch which concerns itself chiefly with spreading and supporting the faith. They establish chapels and temples on worlds, maintain them, and finance missionary ship expeditions. They receive their funding through donations by followers of the order. Most of this comes in the form of selling valuable salvage and combat equipment from fallen enemies on the battlefield, but also from tithes on salaries earned from foreign service. They sometimes also receive bounties from far flung farming communities in which they have temples, from which they defend against and hunt down local pirate forces.

In addition to spreading the faith and financial oversight, the Cult also manages the logistics, equipment maintenance, construction, medical assistance and most of the other non-combat roles for the Order. While technically not worshipping the Great Machine directly, their acts still earn them favor as they are assisting those who do.

The Knighthood of War

War isn't fair. Life isn't fair. Why would its products be any different?

The soldier-knights of the Order who fight in the name of the Great Machine. Knights are all cybernetically enhanced, with some merely using reflex and intelligence-enhancing implants, while others going so far as to install armor and replacing body parts with machine equivalents.

Knights are highly meritocratic, as demonstrated by their tendency to not simply train the body, but improve upon it with cybernetics. This same meritocratic behavior means that, despite their name, the Knights almost never train in melee weapons (which most consider "obsolete"), but instead hone their talents in the art of firearms and vehicle operation, including power armor, tank warfare, fighter piloting, and starship operation.

They also detest the concept of personal pride and honor, as that leads to poor decision-making. For this reason they will never engage in duels of honor against other military orders.

Ecclesiastical Courts

The Ecclesiastical Courts review and sign every contract on behalf of travelling Cultists, freeing them from the tedium of understanding each and every nation's legal system. They may reject contracts they believe are in bad faith, hold unreasonable terms, or may simply involve abhorrent acts that would reflect badly on the Sovereign Military Order. They also have the ability to [nullify existing contracts](#) to safeguard against deliberately misleading contracts or legal loopholes within foreign legal systems.

If a Cultist fails to uphold the terms of their contract, foreign employers can also seek damages by petitioning the ecclesiastical courts. If a genuine breach of contract occurs, the courts will order damages payed by the Sovereign Military Order, and the extradition and punishment of the offender. This also means that Cultists who commit major crimes are all prosecuted by the Order, since they find the wildly varying laws of individual nations to either delve out punishment too lightly or too severely than what they find deserving.

Hierarchy of the Order

Cultists

Grandmaster						
Grand Tyrant	Grand Capitalist	Grand Surgeon	Grand Inquisitor	Grand Technocrat	Grand Marauder	Grand Zealot
Sectormasters						
Sector Tyrant	Sector Capitalist	Sector Surgeon	Sector Inquisitor	Sector Technocrat	Sector Marauder	Sector Zealot
Military-Governors	Outpost Traders	Hospital Admins.	Inquisitor	Base Technicians	Ship Captains	Priests
Tyrants:	Administration, managment, recruitment and training					
Capitalists:	Manage financial and diplomatic matters; conducts business with outside organizations					
Surgeons:	Oversees medical assistance and humanitarian aid efforts					
Inquisitors:	Internal security and othodoxy enforcement					
Technocrats:	Technical, scientific and maintenance division					
Marauders:	The Order's starship division					
Zealot:	Record keepers and historians who dictate what constitute orthodox policy					

Knights

Knight-Lord				
Knight-Commander				
Knight-Captain				Inquisitor
Knight	Chaplain	Savior	Artificer	
Knight-Lord:		Army Commanders		
Knight-Commander:		Company Commanders		
Knight-Captain:		Squad Commanders		

Knights:	Soldiers
Chaplains:	Support unit
Saviors:	Field surgeons
Artificer:	Field engineers

Bases

Chapels

Chapels are the minor offices of the Order. They act primarily as recruitment offices, training centers, and places of worship in high density urban areas where the costs of temples are unfeasible and a defensible position is seen as unnecessary.

Sanctuaries

Sanctuaries are hardened bunkers that act as both places of worship and maintenance workshops for travelling Order members. In smaller farming communities they are often the only hardened structures in the area, so act as shelters during pirate raids or natural disasters. These facilities usually have some sort of low level anti-aerospace defense and shield generators to defend against marauders. Since they are often utilized during times of danger, they usually always have some sort of medical facility.

Sanctuaries are more rarely deployed in high density urban areas if there is a very high crime rate or a politically unstable government. Here they may recruit those with exceptional potential from local gangs, or win over the favor of the populace by hunting down criminals.

Fortress

These are full-fledged military outposts, stations, and trading posts. They are usually have drydock facilities capable of repairing a few ships at once, or disassembling captured enemy vessels for salvage. They usually also sell the broken down military equipment to passing traders at low prices, although they require background checks to make sure they aren't handing off weapons components to pirates or other potential threats. These bases or starports are usually fortified enough to withstand at least a couple of modern military ships, and are most frequently located well outside of civilized space.

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