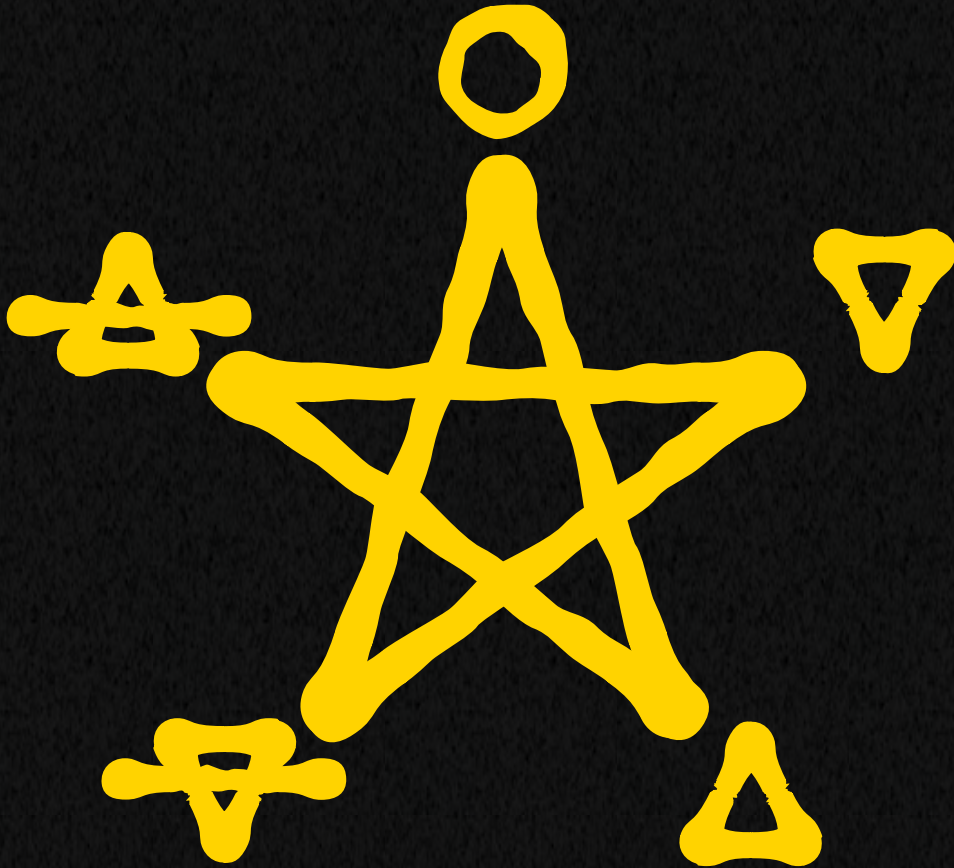


ICONOCLASM®



STRATEGY AND TACTICS
IN THE CLASH OF FAITHS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strategy is a plan to achieve one or more goals under uncertain conditions while tactics are the actual means used to accomplish the strategy. To understand strategy and tactics in Iconoclasm, we must first understand the goal. Iconoclasm is an abstraction of a war between deities. You can win battles by forming groups of your own deity but just like in a real war, it doesn't matter how many battles you win if you lose the last battle. Thus, everything in your strategy should aim at this single goal: form the last group.

2. THE DEITIES

Let's start with some basics. Besides your own deity, there are four other deities to consider, each with a unique relation. (We will assume that you play Fire and return to the neutral Spirit in a later chapter).

- I) The "Master": This is the deity that you support, with the intention of eventually succeed and take over the group from.
- II) The "Traitor": This is the deity that supports you on the outset but really just wait for you to fall so that it may take over the group from you.
- III) The "Antipode": This deity rarely supports you or threatens you and should generally be the first one to eliminate.
- IV) The "Neutral": This deity does not affect any other deity and should be used to maintain the current balance.



Let's look at each of those deities in action.

2.1 THE "MASTER"



The main principle is to stay close to your master and help your master to form a group. In the short term, this creates a strong group that will be able to eliminate other deities. In the long term, your master will be weaker and allow you to take over the group.

Consider the group to the left, where you have 2 tokens and your master has 4 tokens. Following clashes, your master will meet one of two fates:

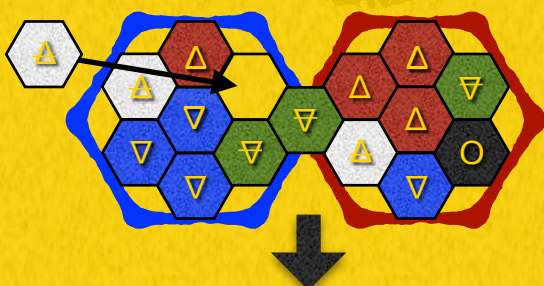
- I) Your master will win the next two clashes. Two of its tokens will be replaced by Spirits, after which you will be stronger and take over the group.



- II) Your master will lose any of the next two clashes. All of its tokens will be removed but you prevail and may eventually form your own group.



2.2 THE "TRAITOR"



As close as you should stay to your master, as far away you should keep your traitor from you. It is true that the traitor supports you but it is best if it is done from other groups than your own. Just do not let the traitor form groups, as they will not support you.



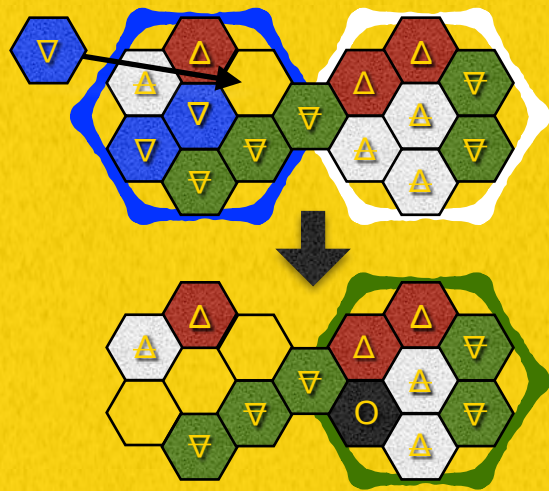
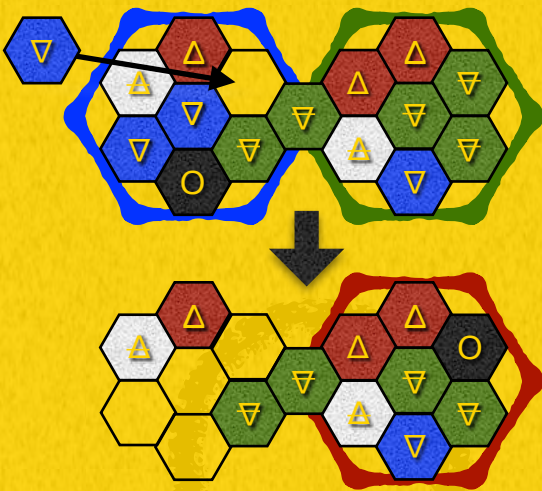
In the example to the left, your group clashes with a Water group. With 4 tokens each, the clash is determined by the supporters Air and Earth. Thanks to your traitor, you win with 4+3 tokens against 4+2.

2.3 THE "ANTIPODE"

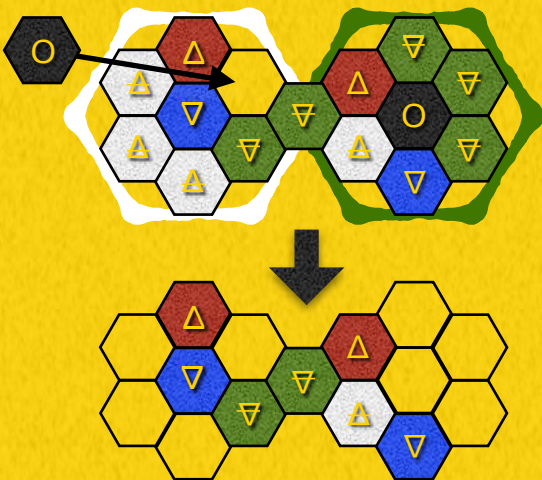
Your antipode deity is of little use to you since it can neither be supported until the time is ripe for takeover (like the master deity), nor provide support (like the traitor deity). However, it can be used as "cannon fodder" when you need to weaken the other two deities.

I) Use your antipode to clash with your master. When the master is weakened, the group can be taken over by yourself.

II) Use your antipode to clash with your traitor. When the traitor is weakened, the group can be taken over by your master and eventually by yourself.



2.4 THE "NEUTRAL"



Given how all the other deities can be useful to your deity, a neutral deity may seem to be of little use since it cannot alter the balance in your favor. However, sometimes you may want exactly this.

In the example to the left, a clash between the Air group and the Earth group will leave one strong group. A Fire token will be wasted while any other token will make the winning deity even stronger. However, a neutral deity will maintain the balance and deform both groups.

3. THE GROUPS

Now that we know more of the deities, let's turn to the groups that they form (and deform). We start by looking at some group basics.

- I. The forming of groups: Groups are formed by seven tokens. The deity with the most tokens in the group gets to place the icon. In case of a tie, the deity with the most supporting tokens in the group gets to place the icon.
- II. The deforming of groups: Groups are deformed if connected to other groups with stronger deities, as measured by the tokens in both groups.

This means that a group has one of the following destinies during a game:

- I. The group suffers no external clash and the original deity keeps the group.
- II. The group survives an external clash and the weakened deity keeps the group.
- III. The group survives an external clash but is taken over by another deity.
- IV. The group is deformed by an external clash.

Let's continue by looking at what determines a group's destiny.

3.1 NO EXTERNAL CLASH

If you form a group that never suffers from external clashes, you will keep it to the end and it may win the game for you. The first strategic guideline is thus to protect your groups from external clashes. Protection can be done in time and space:

- ★ Groups formed late in the game will not leave enough time for external clashes.
- ★ Groups "shielded" by Spirit tokens will not leave enough space for connections.

Shielded Group



3.2 EXTERNAL CLASH WITH WEAKENING

For a group to be weakened and yet remain in your power, two conditions are required.

- ★ First, you must have more tokens than the external challenger. A strong group is desirable but difficult to obtain, not only because you tokens are limited but also because the other players will hardly allow a group to get too strong.

However, bear in mind that tokens in the conflicting group also count. Thus, once a group is about to be formed in your vicinity, you can either play to increase your strength in it (by playing own or supporting tokens) or to dilute the other deity's strength in it (by playing mixed tokens). The second strategic guideline is thus to keep other groups weak.

- ★ Second, and more difficult, you must have more tokens than any internal challenger. Otherwise, you will win the external clash only to lose the group to another deity. The third strategic guideline is thus not to have strong deities in your groups.

Weak external challenger



Weak internal challengers



3.3 EXTERNAL CLASH WITH TAKEOVER

As discussed above, for a group to be taken over, another deity needs to become stronger than the current deity. You can take advantage of this by being the second strongest deity in hope of taking over the group after an external clash. This is particularly powerful if the current deity is your "master" because then you can support the group and help it survive.

Strong supporter

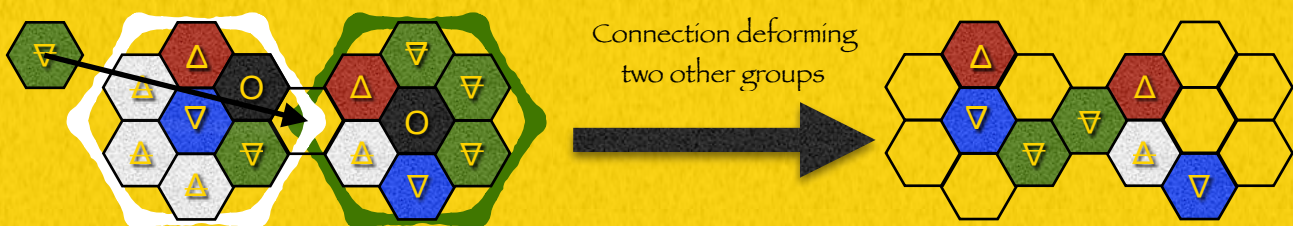


However, you must still consider the destiny of the group. Can it be expected to survive an external clash before the takeover? Can it be expected to survive an external clash after the takeover? The fourth strategic guideline is thus to be a strong supporter in other groups.

3.4 EXTERNAL CLASH WITH DEFORMING

In an external clash, the weaker deity and all its tokens will be removed. This is a disaster to the losing side and should be avoided at all cost. If you have followed the strategic guidelines so far, you should not have to be the victim of an external clash. Instead, use this powerful mechanic to deform weaker groups, starting with groups of your opposing deity, since those are of least use to you.

Remember that you can and should connect groups belonging to other deities to have them weaken each other before you step in. Be cautious though so that not other stronger groups are formed in their places. The fifth strategic guideline is thus to connect and deform other groups.



4. STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES

With the understanding of the deities and the groups, we may now proceed to the strength and the weaknesses of them. The strength of a deity is determined by its groups and the strength of a group is determined by how long it can last.

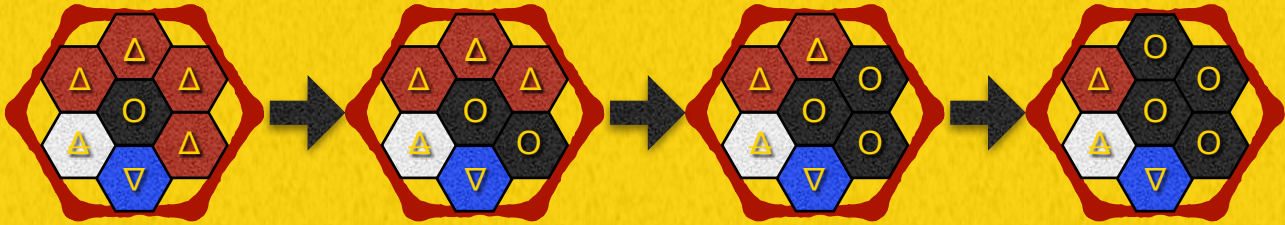
A long-lasting group has a greater chance to trigger a two-group victory (two connected groups) or a three-group victory (any three groups) and a late-lasting group has a greater chance to trigger a last-group victory (most groups when no more groups can be formed). Whenever a group is about to be formed, you should assess its potential strength and play to have it as strong (or weak) as fits your strategy.

Generally, groups should be assessed in terms of strength and predictability:

- I. Strength: The more clashes a group can survive, the longer it will last and the greater is the chance (or the risk) that the winning deity will be found in the group.
- II. Predictability: The more deities a group has, the more its ownership will change and the more complex it will be to predict which of the deities that will win.

4.1 STRONG PREDICTABLE GROUP

Fire has 4 tokens and, if needed, support from 1 Air token. Since Fire has both a primary supporter (Air) and a secondary supporter (Water), the Fire group can survive 4 external clashes before Air takes over. This is a group that Fire should try to keep to the end.



4.2 STRONG SEMI-PREDICTABLE GROUP

Fire has 3 tokens and, if needed, support from 3 Air tokens. Fire will lose the group to Air after the first external clash (after which there are only 2 Fire tokens left) but take it back after the second (after which there are only 2 Air tokens left). Thanks to Water's support, the Air group will also be strong, so this is a group that Fire may try to keep to the end with a well-planned last turn takeover.



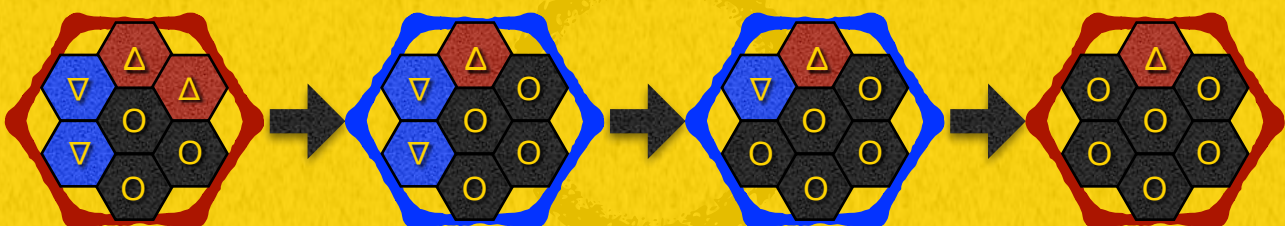
4.3 SEMI-STRONG SEMI-PREDICTABLE GROUP

Fire, Air and Water all have 2 tokens each and, if needed, 2 supporting tokens (except Water). All three deities will take turns to take over the group after external clashes, making it difficult to predict who will end up with it in the end.



4.4 WEAK UNPREDICTABLE GROUP

Fire has only 2 tokens and only indirect support. Even if the group does survive its first external clash, it will be taken over by Water and not retaken again until another 2 external clashes has replaced both Water tokens (if it survives that long).



5. TOKEN MANAGEMENT

The discussion on deities and groups show that different deities can come handy in different situations. Ideally, you will want one of each in the final turns of the game and play them in the following order:



The antipode is the most expendable deity. Play it to trigger a clash between the strongest of your opponent deity groups to weaken or deform them.



Whatever the traitor does, your own deity does it better. Play it to groups that may clash with your own group to get support. However, be cautious not to form antipode groups as your antipode will not support your groups against itself.



The master can either help you or overturn you. If you have no chance of taking over your master's group, you should play it earlier and trigger a clash that will deform it. If you have a chance of taking over your master's group, you should play it later and trigger a clash that will weaken it and let you take over it.



The neutral can be played if you already have a group of your own that you want to protect, either by playing it to potential opponent groups to keep them weak or to shield your own group.



Your own deity can be played both to form your own group and to potential opponent groups to increase your strength in a clash. However, don't wait too long playing it or you may find that the game ends before you get the chance.

The playing order should not be seen as an absolute rule but must be determined by the tactical situation on the board. The example below shows how even an antipode deity can be useful.



I) Earth has a weak group in the center and threatens to form another Earth group beneath it. Fire is in turn and can only prevent it with a Water token, forming a Water group and triggering a clash between the Earth and the Water group.



II) The Earth group will win the clash with 4 Earth tokens against 3 Water tokens but be weakened. The group is taken over by Fire!

6. TIME MANAGEMENT

Now that we know WHAT you can do with the different deities can do, let us look at WHEN to do it. A game consists of up to 60 player turns, after which the last token will have been played. It can typically be divided into three phases, each of which consists of about 20 turns. (Keep track of the phases by checking when a third of the tokens have been played.)

6.1 PHASE 1 - DEFORM YOUR OPPONENT GROUPS

Following the first, second and fifth strategic guidelines above, the first phase is the phase where you avoid forming own groups but rather form, connect and deform weak opponent groups, removing as many opponent tokens and retaining as many own tokens as possible. Consequently, you should prevent your opponents from doing so.

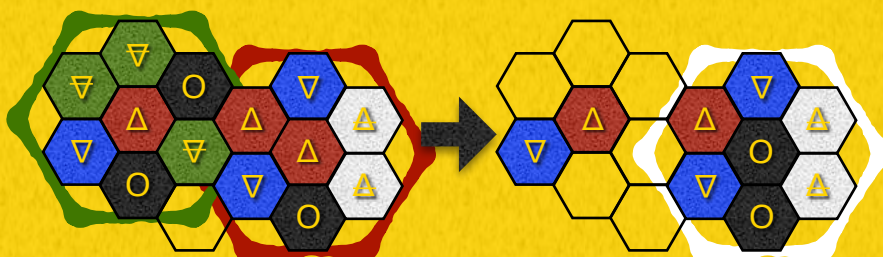
The example below shows three potential groups; an Earth group to the left, a Fire group in the middle and an Air group to the right. If Fire plays a token to 1a, the next player can play to 2 and form a Fire group with 2 Fire tokens that are likely to be removed in the next external clash. However, if Fire plays a token to 1b, it is more likely that an Earth token is formed with one of the Fire tokens. What is even better, an Air token can be formed with the other Fire token, effectively "protecting" the Fire tokens from being part of early groups. If future external clashes deform both groups, the Fire tokens may be part of a Fire group later.



What if a group of your own deity is formed early? Do you protect it at all cost by shielding it with Spirit tokens and adding own and supporting tokens to other groups? No, such actions will only reveal your deity too early (if deities are hidden) and exhaust your tokens. Instead, accept that it will not survive and ensure that it will bring as many other deities in the fall as possible.

1. First, connect other groups and keep your own group out of the external clashes.
2. When an external clash is inevitable, clash against weak groups and/or groups of your master deity, since this deity cannot count the support from your deity in external clashes against your deity.
3. When a loss is inevitable, try to lose through a takeover rather than a deforming so that you do not have to remove all your tokens.

The example below shows how a weak Fire group clashes with a stronger Earth group. However, since the opponent is Earth, it gets no support (Fire does not support against itself) whereas Fire gets support from Air and wins the external clash. Also, Fire is weakened and the group taken over by Air. Fire got rid of 3 Earth tokens in the Earth group while retaining 1 of her 2 Fire tokens in the weak Fire group.



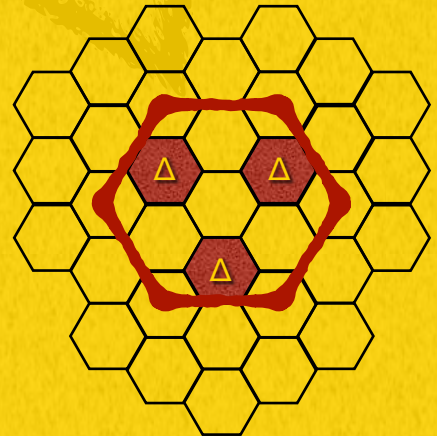
6.2 PHASE 2 - POSITION YOUR OWN GROUPS

In the second phase, the third and fourth guidelines about strong presence in own and other groups become more important. This is the phase where you start positioning your own tokens, not to form groups but to be well prepared to form groups. Strong positions include:

1. Own tokens close enough to be in the same group but spread out enough to be in many other groups.
2. Other tokens close enough to help forming groups but not strong enough to form own groups.
3. Close to your master deity, so that you may support and take over the group after an external clash.
4. Far away from your traitor deity, since its support is better outside your own group.

On the other hand, own tokens in dense but isolated groups are weak. This is because your opponents are unlikely to help you complete the group and, after you have wasted tokens forming it yourself, they may target it for external clashes.

The example to the right shows Fire in a strong triangular position. Together, they can form a strong Fire group, and individually, they can be part of groups covering 3+ hexes or more than half the board. If Fire can get her master deity Earth inside this area and keep her traitor deity Air outside, she is in a good position.



6.3 PHASE 3 - END THE GAME WITH ONLY YOUR GROUPS REMAINING

The game ends when no more clashes are possible so you should be the one triggering the last clash. There are three ways to do that:

1. Form the last group.
2. Deform the last opponent group.
3. Reform the last group.

Victory by forming the last group requires either a scenario where there are no other groups (because they clashed and deformed each other) or where there is only a traitor group left (which will not enjoy your support). Both scenarios typically requires a lucky mistake by the player before you but with good positioning, as discussed above, you can improve the odds. Consequently, avoid playing tokens that will let the player after you trigger the last clash.

The example to the left shows an Air group and an Earth group that will deform each other if connected. (Both have 3 tokens and 2 supporters.) However, connecting would be a mistake by Fire, since this would allow the next player to form the last group as it fits her best. Correct is to first form a Fire group and then connect the Air and Earth groups.



This will leave the Fire group as the last group and give the victory to Fire.

The next example to the right shows how the Fire group has first been connected to the Air group. The Fire group was strong enough not only to deform the Air group (with 4 Fire against 3 Air) but also to deform the Earth group even after 1 Fire has been replaced by 1 Spirit. (The Fire group has 3 Fire supported by 2 Air while the Earth group has only 3 Earth without support.)



This will deform both the last opponent groups and give the victory to Fire.

But what if the Fire group would have first been connected to the Earth group instead of the Air group? The last example to the right shows this. The Fire group was strong enough to deform the Earth group (with 4 Fire against 3 Earth) but not to deform the Air group after 1 Fire has been replaced by a Spirit. (The Air group has 3 Air supported by 2 Water while the Fire group has only 3 Fire without support.)



However, since 1 Air in the victorious Air group is replaced by a Spirit, the group is taken over by Fire thanks to direct support from Air and indirect support from Water.

This will reform the last group and give the victory to Fire.

7. OPPONENT MANAGEMENT

While hand and time management revolves around your own gameplay, balance management is about your opponents' gameplay. Here are some general advice:

- ★ Study your opponents' actions and deduce which deities they play, particularly that of the player following you in turn. This will help you avoid setting up good positions for him or her, such as a position where he or she can form a strong end game group.
- ★ Consequently, keep your own deity hidden as long as possible. This will minimize the risk that your deity gets targeted for removal through external clashes.
- ★ Never allow the forming of two groups of the same deity, since a connection between them will end the game (unless, of course, it is your own deity).
- ★ Also, be very careful with the forming of three groups, where an external clash may result in two groups of the same deity. In the example to the right (slightly modified from above), an external clash between the Air group and the Earth group will deform the Earth group but also reform the Air group and create a second Fire group.



8. THE SPIRIT DEITY (5 PLAYER VARIANT)

Tactically, there is no difference between the Spirit deity and the other deities. All means discussed so far can be used by Spirit. It is the strategy that is different, since the goal is different. The Spirit deity can win in two ways:

1. The last clash removes both the clashing groups, leaving no groups.
2. No clashes can be triggered, leaving two or more groups.

The goals may seem different from each other but the strategy to achieve them is the same: to keep the balance between the deities. Lets us recapitulate the tactics and see how they apply to Spirit.

2. The Deities: While the other deities can focus on the relations of their own deities, the Spirit deity must consider all relations. If one deity gets too strong, promote its antipode deity. If one deity gets a strong master, promote its traitor as well.
3. The Groups: Balance not only deities but also groups. Ideally, groups of different deities should be formed and deformed each time so that different tokens are removed each time and the balance is maintained.
4. Strength and Weaknesses: Promote a mix of deities in the groups to keep them weak and to give you the flexibility to determine which deity that will form the group.
5. Token Management: Balance the tokens so that not too many or too few of the same deity are played and keep Spirit tokens to last as they may be used to shield two remaining groups in the end game.
6. Time Management: As the endgame approaches, determine which two antipode deities that seem likely to form the last groups and try to make them equally strong (so that they may deform each other) and/or distant from each other (so that they never clash before the game ends). Note that it is necessary that they are antipode deities, since other groups are difficult to make equally strong.

The example below shows a Fire group and an equally strong Water group. However, it is not possible to form an equally strong Air group. Air gets support from Water while Fire cannot get support from Air.



7. Opponent Management: This is perhaps even more important for the Spirit deity, since any disruption to the balance may lose the game.

9. CONCLUSIONS

A game of Iconoclasm cannot be played by a strategy determined at start. You must be constantly attentive to tactical threats and opportunities on the board and be prepared to adapt your strategy. In this guide, you have learned the strength and weaknesses of the deities and the groups of Iconoclasm. Applying this knowledge, you will be able to build a strong position on the board and a flexible mix of deities on the hand while at the same time balancing your opponents against each other. Finally, taking advantage of your understanding of the tactics and strategy of Iconoclasm, you will find the right time and place for the decisive clash that wins you the game. Good luck!

CREDITS

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