

Taal, Lord of the Wilds

Description: Ulric is the first son of the Earth Mother, husband and brother of Rhya, and brother of Ulric. He is also the father of Manann, Verena, and Panasia. Taal is the god of the wilderness and storms. His power controls the wind and the rain and drives waterfalls and rapids, avalanches and landslides. Also, Taal is the Master of the Wild Hunt, as well as the lord of beasts, the forests, and the mountains. All of the wild places of the Old World are under his control and all who venture into his realm are expected to show him proper respect. To do otherwise will incur his displeasure (at least), if not his wrath. Taal normally is depicted as a powerful man with long, wild hair, dressed in animal skins and wearing the skull of a great stag as a helmet. Taal may even take the form of a giant stag, great bison, bear, giant eagle, or owl.

Wood Elves and Humans disagree over Taal's nature. To the Elves, Taal is merely a composite made by Humans from Wood Elf spirits such as Torothal, mistress of rains and rivers, and Kurnous, lord of beasts. The Humans believe that the Wood Elven spirits, as well as Karog, god of rivers, are really aspects of Taal. Even more controversial is the view of the Druids who refer to Taal as the Antlered God, consort of the Earth Mother. To them, the Antlered God is limited to the fertility rites associated with the spring equinox and is subservient to the Earth Mother.

Alignment: Neutral. Good and Evil are seen as man-made constructs and thus incompatible with nature. Law and Chaos are abominations to the natural order and are forbidden.

Symbols: Initiates and Priests identify themselves with the following symbols: stag skull or stylized human head with antlers (representing Taal's aspect as lord of the beasts), or stone ax (for his aspect as weather god) with which Taal is said to use to cause thunder, lightning, and avalanches. Priests wear robes of grey, dark brown, and drab green decorated with one or more of his symbols. The cult token is a wooden medallion with either golden antlers or silver stone axe device. The cult token may also be of other natural symbols: trees, mountain peaks, etc.

Area of Worship: Taal is worshipped throughout the wilds of the Old World, especially in the north and east (notably northern Bretonnia, the Empire, Norsca, and Kislev). Most of Taal's followers are hunters, trappers, and others who depend on the natural world. In some quarters, the worship of Taal is intermingled with that of Rhya, goddess of fertility. There are even some Elementalists who worship Taal. They are usually hermits who prefer the wilderness to the company of their fellow Man and they use their magic to understand the natural world, not to dominate it.

Temples: The vast majority of the temples to Taal are either in the wilderness or on its edge. There is no recognized centre of worship – when matters require a meeting of the senior priests, the synod is held at the temple of the priest who called the meeting. Temples are independent and have no authority over each other, save for the moral authority wielded by a priest known for his wisdom.

Temples to Taal are generally circular and built of rough, unmortared stone with conical roofs. The oldest temples, which are found in the northern Empire (the largest of which is located outside of Wolfenburg in Ostland), have timber-framed roofs covered with thatch or turf. Containing only a circular, central hearth, temples of Taal are empty. There are no statues,

altars, seats, nor any other furnishings. The hearth is built up from the floor in two or three rows of stone walling and usually faced with bison or bear skulls.

Shrines take several forms from miniature temples to sacred grooves like those utilized by the cult of the Earth Mother. Groves of Taal are marked by a skull of a stag, bison, or bear hung on the oldest (and largest) tree. Mountain shrines take the form of a cairn topped by the skull of a stag, bison, or bear. It is customary for all passers-by to show their respect by adding a stone to the cairn.

Friends and Enemies: The cult of Taal is friendly and closely allied with the cults of Rhya, Ulric, and Manann. They are also friendly to, but cautious of, the cult of Earth Mother. The cult is neutral towards the cults of other Old World Gods. Additionally, they are tolerant towards the cults of the Elder Races, except those of the Wood Elves (who have demeaned the god with their incorrect view of his nature) which border on antipathy. Enemies of Orc and Chaos cults as the cult of Taal holds them responsible for the destruction of vast areas of wilderness.

Holy Days: The principal holy day dedicated to Taal is the spring equinox, which marks the awakening of nature after its winter slumber. Minor festivals and observances occur during the summer and winter solstices, and the autumn equinox.

Saints: Saints of Taal are usually great huntsman, trappers, and priests with legendary knowledge and skills in the wilderness. One was Wolfgang Jäger, a priest who swore to rid the forest village of Altwald of the scourge preying on its people. For eight weeks Jäger stalked his prey. The elusive creature continued to kill, but in a manner that taunted Jäger. Then on Geheimnistag 1652 IC, Jäger caught up with his quarry – a minotaur over 20 feet tall. They battled without rest for the next eight days. At times, the hunter became the prey and the quarry became predator. Jäger finally slew the Chaos creature and returned to the devastated village with its head and skin, which remain as trophies in the Wolfenburg temple to this day.

Cult Requirements: Those seeking to become Priests of Taal may come from any non-urban background. They must be trained and sponsored by a priest of Taal.

Priestly Orders, including Monks:

The Society of the Bear is a secret order of monks dedicated to Taal and his role of protector of the wild places. So completely at home in the wilds, their wilderness skills exceed that of most men. They meet together in a previously chosen wilderness location on the chief holy day to Taal (Spring Equinox). At that time, they exchange whatever information they've learned over the course of the previous year and reaffirm their role in their lord's world.

Although they never divulge their membership to their order to outsiders, individual Bear members may be hired to escort small and large parties (up to small armies) through the wilderness. Their only requirement is that those who are being led do nothing to despoil the realm of Taal. Any group who fail to heed this requirement may unknowingly find themselves led to, and abandoned in, the deepest and most isolated part of the wilderness. There these offenders will face the displeasure of Taal.

Prerequisite Career: Those who join this monastic order usually come from a Ranger career, mostly hunters, outriders, or scouts. All must be members of the cult of Taal and have been selected by a priest of Taal.

Sponsored Fighting Orders:

Founded by Klem Förster in the aftermath of the Great War Against Chaos, the Order of the Huntsman is dedicated to the eradication of the twisted Chaos creatures infesting the northern forests. The Huntsmen use all the techniques of hunters – snares, deadfalls, ambushes – when pursuing their goal. The Huntsmen operate in small lightly-armoured teams of four to six, primarily in the Forest of Shadows. The recent rise in the number of mutants and coven of Chas worshippers at the turn of the 26th century have caused the Huntsmen to expand into eastern Talabecland and Nordland. Lodges of Huntsmen are independent of one another, though two or three neighbouring lodges may join forces for a major hunt. The oldest lodge is located in the forests to the north of the Ostlander village of Kurst.

Prerequisite Career: Huntsmen must come from a Ranger career, mostly hunters, outriders, or scouts with some experience in a martial career serving on or alongside a battlefield. All must be members of the cult of Taal and have been selected by a priest of Taal.

Strictures: All Initiates, Priests, and Monks must abide by the following strictures:

- Never harm any animal except in self-defence, for food, for need, or sacrifice.
- Give back to nature an equal measure of what one receives from it.
- Always respect the animals of the wild, whether they are prey or predator.
- Once per month at the time of Mannslieb's new phase, Initiates and Priests must ritually hunt and capture an animal for sacrifice to Taal.
- All Priests must spend seven days and seven nights each year living alone in the wilderness such as a forest or mountain, beginning at the Winter Solstice. They may eat only what they can catch
- All Initiates and Priests are forbidden to wear metal armour, but they may use shields and any type of weapon except firearms and explosives.

Spell Use: Priests of Taal may cast any Elemental Magick spell, as well as the following Battle and Illusion Magick spells: Wind Blast, Lightning Bolt, Mystic Mist, Sense of Green, Illusion of the Woods.

They may also use the following cult spell:

Find Quarry

Spell Level: First

Magic Points: 3

Range: 100 yards

Duration: D6+2 turns

Ingredients: Small wooden model of quarry

This spell enables the priest to sense the direction and distance of a quarry as represented by the model consumed by the spell. The priest will be able to find the tracks of the quarry should he

comes across such within the duration of the spell, even if the tracks are laid in a stream or across rocks. This spell cannot be used to locate a specific individual or creature, just one represented by the model.

Blend

Spell Level: Second

Magic Points: 4

Range: Touch

Duration: 2D6+6 rounds

Ingredients: Two foot-long branches with leaves

This spell allows the priest to enable the touched target (which could be the priest himself) to blend into the surrounding terrain. Affected individuals may move at a cautious rate and remain virtually undetectable by sight or smell for the duration of the spell. However, if the affected individual moves towards an enemy character, then the enemy is allowed to make an **Observe+10** test to detect the threat. The spell does not grant silent move to the affected individual.

Summon Wild Hunt

Spell Level: Fourth

Magic Points: 30

Range: 10 yards of Priest

Duration: Until the hunt is completed or dawn breaks

Ingredients: A hunter's horn

One of the strongest available to priests, this spell must be used only in the most desperate of situations (e.g., when a mighty Chaos warband of thirty strong led by a Chaos Hero is about to descend on a camp of a young noble lady escorted by three armed guardsmen). The spell grants the priest the power to summon the Wild Hunt into the world. The Huntsman and his hounds appear facing the direction of their quarry, but wait for the priest's request before sounding the horn (signalling that the hunt has begun). The Huntsman, a large man with stag antlers and cloven hooves for feet, runs with the baying hounds as they pursue their prey. He is armed with spear, sword, and bow and may use spells as if he were a fourth level priest of Taal. Should the quarry be particularly powerful, the Huntsman may tap into the Magic Points of his hounds. Thus, only the strongest of foe have any chance -- remote that it is -- to survive the hunt.

Huntsman

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
9	85	55	9	9	22	85	6	75	85	85	85	85	85

Magic Points: 40

6 Hounds of the Wild Hunt

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Dex	Ld	Int	Cl	WP	Fel
9	45	0	5	5	11	55	3	0	40	35	60	40	25

Magic Points: 10

Should the priest summon the Wild Hunt for a trivial matter (e.g., killing a band of ten goblin wolfriders because the priest and his four buddies didn't want to risk themselves in a battle), the Huntsman will appear without his hounds. Facing the offending priest, the Huntsman will announce that the priest has incurred the wrath of Taal and punishment would be forthcoming. There is a 10% chance that the punishment will result in the offending priest becoming the object of the hunt (in which case the Huntsman will give the cleric a fifteen-minute head start). Otherwise, the Huntsman will simply vanish and the priest will have to await Taal's decision.

Skills: An Initiate of Taal receives the Charm Animal skill upon their acceptance to the cult in addition to the normal range of skills. Initiates also gain a limited form of Augury, which allows them to predict changes in weather. Moreover, Priests of Taal may acquire (for the prerequisite 100 experience points) an additional skill from the Ranger skill chart (**WFRP**, page 17) for each level of advancement. If the character already owns the skill indicated, they may roll until they obtain one that they do not possess. Alternatively, Initiates and Priests of Taal may choose whenever they advance a level: Augury (full strength), Astrology, Scrying and Scapulomancy. Priests of Taal have a 1% chance of gaining Oracle skill and a 3% chance of gaining Visionary skill each time they rise in level; these skills cost 100 experience points each.

Trials: Trials set by Taal normally deal with the natural environment and elements, and challenge cultists to survive in harmony with them. Cultists may be required to spend a number of days and nights in a forest or mountainous area. Some may be commanded to hunt a powerful animal, such as a bear or bison, using only that which is provided by nature. Other trials may demand clearing an area of despoiling Goblins or other monsters using skills in stealth, woodcraft, setting traps, etc. Maintaining and cleaning all temples and shrines within a ten-mile radius, performing servant duties for families living in the wilderness, planting trees and removing man-made objects to reclaim abandoned farmlands for nature.

Blessings: Skills favoured by Taal include Acute Hearing, Charm Animal, Concealment Rural, Dowsing, Excellent Vision, Fish, Follow Trail, Game Hunting, Herb Lore, Orientation, River Lore, Set Traps, Silent Move Rural, Spot Traps, and Swim. Favoured tests are Hide, Listen, Observe, and Sneak. Other blessing might include an enhanced effect to a skill already possessed by the blessed character or a temporary increase to Initiative, Intelligence, and Cool.