



Rhya is the Earth Mother, source of fertility and the Autumn harvest.

## THE LONGSHANKS

Taal and Rhya have no Templars who take to the field of battle in serried ranks of steel and gaudy pennants. Theirs are not the kind of people to produce such warriors. A people of countryside and village, the followers of the dual gods are more familiar with a badger's run or a fox's hole deep in the woods than the tournament lists. That does not mean, however, that the cult lacks dedicated defenders of all it holds dear. Indeed, theirs is an ancient order they claim predates the founding of the Empire: the rangers known as the "Longshanks."

The Longshanks are exceptionally skilled outdoorsmen, most of whom venerate Taal above Rhya, while some northerners worship her in her aspect as Haleth the Huntress. Bound by oath to never stay in one place for more than a week, they wander the wildernesses of the Empire on horseback and foot, checking ancient shrines and barrows to make sure they remain inviolate, opposing the ruthless depletion of land and river, and rooting out threats from Chaos and

Greenskins alike. They usually travel alone, sometimes in groups of two or three, and rarely enter towns or cities. Armed with bow and sword, they are powerful guardians of wild places.

Members are recruited in youth from villages and farms, taken as apprentices by older rangers ready to pass on their wisdom. Training is long and arduous, and a probationer may not see a settlement for months or years at a time. While the order has no official headquarters, its ranks gather every seven years in the woods near Taal's sacred city of Talabheim to renew their vows and honour their gods.

Since the war began, the order has become active in the fight against Archaon. Its members operate as guerrillas behind enemy lines, striking fast and retreating into wild places they know better than anyone. They have also provided invaluable service to the Emperor's armies as scouts and outriders warning of enemy movements and assessing his strength and plans.

## SUB-CULTS

Worshipped since the earliest days of human occupation of the lands of the Empire, the cult of Taal and Rhya has many sub-cults, most of which are local names for the gods and honour a particular aspect. Thus the Wood Elves of Laurelorn know Taal as the feminine goddess of rain and rivers, Torothal, while the humans who live on the river honour him as Karog, which may be the name of an ancient Kislevan deity. The hunters of Talabecland and Middenland, meanwhile, make sacrifices to Taal as Karnos, Lord of the Beasts.

Rhya, too, has her sub-cults, such as Haleth in the north and Dyrath in the west, the latter symbolising her aspect as Lady of Fertility and Midwifery. Most strange and, among scholars, controversial, is the sub-cult of Lupos the Wolf, the Lord of Predators. One of the oldest sub-cults, with evidence dating back to before the time of Sigmar, some speculate that this is an early form of Ulric, who once may have been part of a triune aspect incorporated in the archaic deity Ishernos. Little more is known, for the worshippers of Lupos have little to do with civilisation and are known as wild and dangerous, even by cultists of Taal and Rhya.

## ULRIC

Ancient and powerful, the cult of Ulric, Lord of Winter, Wolves, and Battle, has suffered greatly from Archaon's invasion. Its warriors were in the forefront of most of the battles against the invader in the field and at the siege of Middenheim and, though they held and killed many of the enemy, they themselves paid a dire price in the numbers given over to Morr's cold embrace. Yet death in battle is an honour to an Ulrican. What has the leaders of the cult worried more are the questions of morale and growing doubt. In addition

## ANCIENT WORSHIP

Some scholars believe they can trace the origins of many gods and religious practices back to ancient tribal times. Little is known about this "Old Faith" other than a few scratched runes and strange inscriptions. Believed to be a primitive form of nature worship, traces of this elder religion can still be seen, if one knows where to look. Some scholars point to common threads of myth and lore that span much of the Old World as proof that this old way was once a widespread religion. Certainly, the weird stone circles in which they were said to perform their blood soaked sacrifices can be found throughout the Empire. Most cults dismiss this dead faith, and actively seek to subvert any "elder meaning" held by the monoliths and circles. Only the priests of Taal and Rhya, together with the Jade and Amber Order, see any value in these eldritch and ancient standing stones.

to the deaths of so many valiant warriors and the severe damage done to Ulric's sacred city, the fact that they were saved only by the arrival of an army of westerners—Sigmar worshippers—and an army of the Undead has led to whispers



that perhaps the god's time is passing, and his cult declining. Word has come of Myrmidia gaining ground in the southern provinces, and some warriors have spoken approvingly of her sub-cult, Fury. Though there are only faint rumblings so far, in private the Ar-Ulric and his hierarchy are worried.

## THE SONS OF ULRIC

As described in the *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* rulebook, the Sons of Ulric are an heretical sect that believes in their natural right to rule the cult by virtue of their assumed direct descent from Ulric himself. Theirs is a rejectionist cult that denies the rights of all other cults to practise and worship in the northlands, Ulric's sacred territory. As for the cult of Sigmar, an extremist faction within the Sons even denies Sigmar's divinity, claiming that the myth of his elevation to divine status is a lie or a delusion masking demonic influences. The sect was long ago banned as part of Magnus's religious settlement and its members, if revealed, are considered outlawed and can be killed on sight.

As a clandestine order, the Sons recruit their members carefully and in secret. Only men and women of established northern Ulrican families may join, and only after careful vetting to ensure their fanatical devotion to Ulric. Training and worship takes place in hidden places: the basement chambers of noble mansions, abandoned warehouses and farms, or elsewhere. Further training takes place in the wilderness of the Forest of Shadows and the Drakwald, where recruits demonstrate their bravery by killing wild beasts with their bare hands and teeth. Initiates who fail their tests, if they do not die in the process, are usually killed in combat by the one who recruited them, as he seeks to expunge the stain on his honour.

The Sons, since their banning, have become skilled at dissimulation, hiding amongst the populace, and even holding high-ranking positions in the cult of Ulric itself. From within they seek to weaken the orthodox hierarchy and the power of the Graf, until they can seize power themselves and establish a theocracy. They are numerous around Middenheim, but also have significant adherents in Nordland and Carroburg.

The leadership of the Sons sees the war with Archaon as an opportunity and the troubles of orthodox cult as a sign of the loss of Ulric's favour, which belongs to the Sons, naturally. Debate within the sect now revolves around whether the time to strike is coming and, in preparation; plans are being made to "purify" the cult by assassinating the Ar-Ulric and Graf Boris.

## SUB-CULTS

Ulric has many sub-cults, of which the Sons of Ulric are only one illegal example. Recognised sub-cults include Ursash, a Norscan sect that venerates Ulric as a hunter of bears, which often raid Norscan farmsteads. There is also Ulric Blood-hand, which symbolises Ulric as the personification of berserk fury. It is popular with footmen and templars who lose themselves in rage on the battlefield, often making themselves as much a danger to their friends as to their foes.



Ulric, Lord of Winter, Wolves and Battle.

One sub-cult, that of the Snow King, places less emphasis on battle than on the struggle to survive the rigours of winter. Its adherents are ascetics who live where winter is harshest, testing themselves and fighting not just to survive, but to thrive. Found from Nordland to Kislev and Norsca, devotees of Ulric Snow King feel it their duty to test others as well, by making life as hard as possible for them in winter. This sometimes includes the destruction of food stores to tax their "students" abilities to find food, which makes them less than popular in areas they inhabit.

## VERENA

Known for wisdom and a love of justice throughout the Old World, the cult of Verena is held in high regard by almost all, even if its most devoted members are limited to scholars, jurists, and seekers after the truth. Indeed wizards are welcome in her cult, particularly those of an academic bent, such as Celestial wizards.



While lacking a centralised hierarchy—the cult prefers to operate in a collegial manner within and between temples—it has nevertheless been a powerful force in the Empire's politics. Verenan priests and priestesses, or those educated by them, are often influential behind-the-scenes advisors in noble and Imperial courts, while Verenans constitute a sizeable faction of the judiciary, behind the Sigmarites. When not already involved, they often insert themselves into proceedings as a "friend of the court" when they fear justice is not being served.