

# Chapter VI ~ The Gods of the Womb

## God of Law and Justice

# The Courts of Maal

**Maal (MAH)** (Steely Eyed, the Judge, Firstborn, Judge of Souls, King of Souls)

## Myth

### First Vengeance and First Law

Before the Compact, when Maal Firstborn's kingdom was new, before the Three Sisters emerged and Naryne became Queen of Souls, Maal decreed vengeance to be the first great crime.

Steely Eyed Maal sat then in judgment upon his great throne as he does now. His grey court was particularly bustling one day long ago, and his servants had difficulty holding back the throng. Eventually, a man in blue and white came to stand before the Judge of Souls.

"Speak your name and tell of your life," Maal's Voice demanded.

"I am Ceruill," the man replied, "a simple bard who was in love." Ceruill told Maal's court of his life, often relying on song or poetry to capture the moment. He had been the minstrel in the palace of a great and powerful king, wherein he had fallen in love with the king's daughter, Ophiel. Unfortunately for him, a neighboring prince named Faristel had also fallen in love with the princess, and had petitioned her father for her hand in marriage.

But the princess did not love Faristel. Ceruill's songs and poems had won her heart long before, and when her father told her of Faristel's proposal, she told her father of her abiding love for the court minstrel. The king had always loved Ceruill dearly and decided he would allow his daughter to marry for love rather than riches and politics.

It was arranged, and Ceruill and Ophiel had the most magnificent marriage the kingdom had ever seen. But Faristel was consumed with jealous rage. How could this dotard of a king choose a lowborn minstrel over a prince for his daughter's hand? He became increasingly convinced that the entire affair was a scheme, that Ceruill had cast the court under some sort of dire enchantment – an enchantment that would only be broken upon Ceruill's death.

The night after the wedding, Faristel and five of his men-at-arms broke into the chambers of Ceruill and Ophiel as they slept in each other's arms. Faristel bent down and woke Ceruill, whispering in his ear that he would save Ophiel and her father from the minstrel's foul magic. And with that, he plunged a blade into the bard's heart.

Ceruill's tale told, Maal's Voice bade him kneel for judgment. Maal the Judge pondered the story for some time and at last ordained, "Your heart has been rich with love, and you have brought beauty into this world. You shall abide in the fourth hall and here be blessed."

Ceruill was led away to the fourth hall to live out eternity in joy rather than be reborn. The next eight men to come before Steely Eyed Maal were either guards from outside Ophiel's chamber or Faristel's men-at-arms. It became clear that moments after Ceruill died, Ophiel's screams summoned the guards, resulting in a terrible, bloody battle.

Finally, Faristel came before Maal, his heart having been pierced by an arrow as he tried to escape. For his crimes, Maal sentenced Faristel to suffer for eternity in the third pit. And once this was done, Maal thought the tale done with.

Over the next days and weeks, more and more men came before Maal from the kingdoms of Ophiel's father and Faristel's. It seemed that Faristel's father had declared war on Ophiel's when word reached him of Faristel's death. More and more souls came before Maal, all killed because Faristel had slain Ceruill.

Eventually, Ophiel and her father both stood before the Judge of Souls. In her grief over Ceruill's murder, Ophiel had hurled herself into a river. Upon learning of his daughter's death, the king took his own life in misery. More of the king's subjects came before Maal then, for without a ruler, the nation was soon torn to pieces by its neighbors, leaving blood and fire in their wake.

When all was done, some fifty thousand souls had stood before Maal, all killed in a chain of events that began with one murder. It became clear to the King of Souls that some sort of order must be brought to the mortal world to prevent this sort of catastrophe in the future, and so he summoned before him the representatives of twelve great rulers. These wise men and women journeyed to the lands of the dead to stand before the throne of Judgment, whereupon Maal decreed:

"Blood for blood shall not be law, but lawlessness. If you should kill my brother, then I will call upon my lord's law for justice and shall not seek to avenge my brother's death with my own hand. I declare this day that no man shall have a right to vengeance, but all men shall have a right to justice."

The wise men and women bowed their heads, ready to take this decree to their lords, when Issama, the chamberlain of a great and powerful queen of the East, stepped forward. "Grave Lord Maal," she cried out, "What if my lord is a tyrant and shall not give me justice? Am I to allow this foul murder of my brother to go unavenged?"

The other eleven cringed, ready for Maal to lash out in fury. Instead, he was silent for a great while. At last he spoke: "You are wise, Issama, and you shall stand at my left when your time has come. Yes, you will allow this foul murder to go unavenged because on this day I, Lord Maal, judge and king of your mortal souls, swear this oath to my short-lived cousins: There shall always be justice. Though you may not see it in your time, though you may not understand its workings, you must trust in me – there shall always be justice, and no crime shall go unpunished. I shall take a dark view of anyone who should doubt me in this and let his sword drip with the blood of vengeance."

With that, Maal was silent, and the mortal races knew his great law: that a terrible and ancient doom lies on any who should seek to avenge a crime done against him. All must trust in the law and know that justice will prevail.

Over the years following this first edict, Maal summoned the servants of twelve great rulers before him to give to them laws several more times, in the end forming a great code from which the most perfect of mortal societies could blossom. But the rulers failed to live by the laws; they were eventually all consumed or destroyed by wars, and the laws of Maal were lost to antiquity. To this day, only the first law passed from Maal's lips to mortal ears is remembered, and it is still powerfully difficult for the mortal races to obey.

## Associations

Maal is the god of Justice, Law, the Dead, the land of the dead, retribution, lawyers, magistrates, judges, and all others who make their living through the law or have a special love for law.

In the animal kingdom, he is associated with the owl, a bird said to know no partiality, sitting in judgment of the world from its bough. Among mystical creatures, he is associated with the sphinx, the first of which was born from one of his many adventures.

Maal is most popular among humans and dwarves, both of whom often have elaborately legalistic societies. Dwarves love him further because he was the first to delve into the earth and build a home. The King of Souls is also beloved of mixed races, particularly half-orcs who reject the chaotic nature of their orc brethren. This is because Maal's law applies to all equally and knows no prejudice. Regardless of popularity, all mortal races worship Maal, since they all come to stand before him in the end.

## Alignment

Maal is lawful neutral. Law is everything to Maal, though his laws are perfect and wise and would be thought to be "good" were they the laws of any mortal realm.

## Representations

When shown in icons, Maal is represented as among the tallest of the gods, thin, with long hair, adorned in shining black armor. When painted, he has steely grey eyes that pierce deep into men's souls. He is always represented with Justice, his sword, either held before him with the point toward the ground, or held aloft in his right hand, tip skyward. When pointed down it means that Maal has found someone guilty or unworthy, or that he stands in judgment. Upward means he is pleased by an act of righteousness. Because of this it is common to cheer a great deed by raising swords aloft, tips to heaven, even among those who are not adherents of Maal's church.

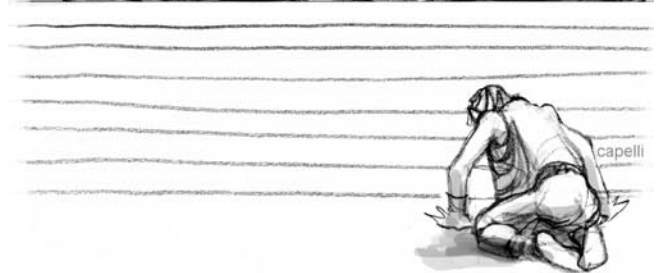
The symbolic representation of Maal is the sword Justice. Holy Warriors of Maal usually have a small silver sword, generally pointed upward, as their symbol. Clerics will often use this symbol, but sometimes use a sword lying sideways with an owl perched on its edge – this is Maal's owl, Wisdom, perched on the razor's edge of Justice. Because Justice was carved from metals created by the Nameless One, more expensive and formal symbols are crafted from the most exotic metals the faithful can find. The sword in these symbols usually has the word "Justice" carved into it in the cleric's native language. When no details or fine craftwork are possible, the symbol of Maal can be made with a few quite strokes indicating a stylized sword. This is a hasty symbol and is only used as a stamp, or when time does not allow a more formal symbol to be made.

## Purpose

Maal stands in judgment of every mortal who dies. This is a profoundly important purpose, as it is through Maal that the final reckoning comes for all. While beyond good and evil himself, Maal determines whether a mortal has lived a good or evil life. He listens to the tales of their lives and then consults the black and white ledgers of their deeds recorded in Elysium and Gehenna respectively, deciding on one of four fates for mortals:

If they are truly evil, they are cast down into Hell, Gehenna, or the Abyss.

If they have led an acceptable life, but not distinguished themselves in thought and deed, they remain in his realm until it is time for them to be reborn.



Maal sits in judgment of Ceruill long ago in the time before the Sacred Laws.