

# SUZERAIN



m o r t a l r e a l m s





The twinkle in his eye hardened to a much colder glint as his gaze swept across the room, lingering over certain carefully sealed scrolls. Striding towards a stack perched perilously on a sloping shelf, he selected a scroll at random and held it to the light.

The enchanter displayed it carefully from all angles, as if preparing to open bidding. "I doubt I need to demonstrate this. Remarkably similar to one old Sindarius was rumored to be preparing a few months ago. In fact, if it weren't for the lack of makers' sigil on the case I'd swear it were his..."

The enchanter's voice trailed off to a monotone as he continued to turn the thing round and round in the firelight. Talia watched it dumbly, as if hypnotized; though she was certain that had not been one of its original properties.

Set into the wax of the seal was a round white stone (a pearl, she dimly remembered), and as it spun, it picked up a thin film of shimmering light, like oil. Its beauty was compelling, and her eyes followed it intently. All the while the enchanter's voice washed over her like an incessant river, wearing away her consciousness....

## How the Universe *really* works

*Can you feel them?  
Their thoughts  
It's the power that creates us*

From the first sentient ramblings of mankind, there has been belief in spirits of one form or another. Such spirits are seen as many things, from angels to demons, from gods to ghosts. Some beliefs become widely accepted and become religions. Most pass into mythology with the turning of the centuries and millennia. The Universe, however, stores all that belief, because it never knows when it might come in handy.

The End Times approach, with entire sections of the Universe withering into nothing while others are engulfed by cataclysms as varied as the planets themselves. More and more people join the chorus of voices that say there must be a 'greater force' to save mankind from ultimate destruction. After centuries of general agnosticism, religious leaders rise to spread their individual forms of belief - charismatic people acting as the mouthpiece of their god or gods. Long forgotten deities and heroes are making their way back into current mythology. The Universe, straining under the pressure of its cosmic disease, is reacting in the only way it can - activating its immune system...



As fanatical cults rise in popularity, fuelled by the belief in the impending collapse of all existence, a link forms. Where large enough numbers of true believers appear and preach the twisted gospel of long-dead religions, and where the original religions have a big enough pool of belief stored up, the Universe uses all this faith to create *real* spirits.

Sentient entities form in a realm called the Maelstrom, a plane of pure energy known as Pulse. Pulse is the energy of magic, of ESP, of supernatural powers. It is also the building material of the human soul. The souls of mortals dissolve into the Pulse of the Maelstrom when their mortal body dies. Pulse becomes the souls of new-born children. Pulse is also the basic form of sustenance for Incarnates, the spirits of the Maelstrom, and fuels their powers. They mould it into physical objects and buildings using conjurings and their raw imagination.

These beings are the incarnations of their mortals' beliefs. For example, where the End Times' fanatics are following a synthesis of the Greek and Roman myths stirred in with a big pot of original Greco-Roman belief, Incarnates form in the guise of the Classical gods. And indeed, this is one of the groups that flourishes.

The first Incarnates become the gods themselves. They grow in power as the mortals' faith grows. More Incarnates are born to each belief system as faith continues to grow. Each of these lowly spirits aspires to godhood. Dominions are formed by the strongest groups, who fashion the raw Pulse of the Maelstrom into a vision of their mortal lands. Thus, Jupiter has formed Olympus in the image of the ancient Rome he feels might have once been, and it is comfortable to him and the other Olympians.

There are thirteen Dominions known to exist, although very little is known about one of them. The Incarnates in each Dominion think and act differently. They have their own gods, their own Arcana (supernatural powers), and their own way of seeing the Universe and shaping the Pulse into their lands.

The day comes when the gods become aware of the edges of the Maelstrom. There, on the borders, lies the Barrier that separates the Maelstrom from the Mortal Realms. It is a nebulous screen that swirls with opaque pulsating colors. Looking through in moments when the colors part before closing in again, they see glimpses of humanity; glimpses from its past, from its future, right up to the End Times itself. And they understand.

Their task is to help the Universe heal and overcome its disease. The only question is how. Even for the combined gods of the Dominions, this is a task to test them greatly. Their powers on the other side of the Barrier are weak, their knowledge fragmented.

The gods are just like any other Incarnate, except that they have reached a point where, in the Maelstrom at least, they are 'Ascended' and understand the greater truths of existence. They can mould whole cities and landscapes with their power, but they still have limited control on the other side of the Barrier. This is why they require Reincarnate mortals to travel back and forth across the Barrier with the aim



of fulfilling the wishes of their gods and averting the End Times.

Even with their limitations in the Mortal Realms, every Incarnate aspires to reach the ranks of their Dominion's gods. Only the existing gods can grant that boon, so each Incarnate looks to increase their status in the eyes of their gods, measured in Karma, and the political games and internal shenanigans of each Dominion take shape as they battle each other for the gods' attention.

Talia hung, seemingly lifeless, amidst an enveloping darkness, occasional bursts of light circling her before fading away once more. She watched them dumbly, like a new-born child staring at a bright mobile. The lights began to swirl, one particular strand coagulating into images, into the past...

Sitting at another knife-scarred wooden table in another faceless back-street tavern, she haggled over the price of the thing she had made. Her customer shifted slightly, his clothes rippling over his lithe body. He had told her his name was Maelen. She could think of other names for him. She looked into his speckled eyes, giving herself up to their grey depth. His voice was softly mesmerizing, evocative of something she could not place. For a moment she allowed herself to sink under the power of his effect.

The shoreline stretched away. She had seen something like this before, in the deep hot deserts where she found the snakeskin. The desert, though, had been undulating and endless. This faded after a few meters into a constantly shifting surface ... the sea, the end of the world. Its expanse seemed to hint at infinite mysteries under its blue-grey surface. The sighing sound of each wave breaking was like a voice, whispering unintelligible secrets.

Beyond the sea lay the bright chaos that was the raw, unformed energies of the Maelstrom itself. It billowed and shifted like a whirlpool seen in a fever dream. After looking at it for several minutes her head started to reel, but she didn't move away. It was compelling, insanely beautiful, and she found herself longing to jump in the ancient waters and swim out to it. She stepped onto the sand, each grain shifting under her feet... grains of sand...shifting... grey speckled sand...

At that table, that was when Talia had realized the power of the raw Maelstrom for the first time. A power so potent it radiated from every eye that had seen it for itself. A power she'd sought out and got to know for herself since that night.

The scene shifted back to darkness, leaving her watching her swirling mobile once more....



## Karma

*Karma is your place in the grand scheme of things.  
It ties you to your Dominion and your gods.  
Don't ever forget that, because they surely won't.*  
Terell, Master Incarnate, Olympus

Karma is a measure of a spirit's standing in the eyes of the patron gods of their Dominion. High Karma shows willingness by the gods to help the spirit in question. The more they have, the more prominently that spirit is thought of by the gods. If that spirit has low Karma, then they've cashed in all their favors and are on their own.

In practical terms, when a spirit gains a certain amount of Karma, the gods judge them as being closer to godhood. Thus they rise through the ranks.

Calling on the gods for favors can use up Karma. Raising attributes, teaching Arcana, and helping out when the going gets tough all use up Karma. This is because a spirit distracts the gods from their attempts to heal the Universe and from their battles, physical, spiritual, and social/political that they are involved in against the other Dominions and the members of their own Dominions. The gods hate distractions and so the characters suffer by becoming lower in the eyes of the gods. Gods grant Karma as a reward for achieving their goals and completing the tasks they have set.

Her heartbeat thudded loud, and running footsteps filled her ears. The undergrowth scraped her legs as she ran and flies fastening on to feed on the pumping blood. Still they followed, incessant hoofbeats. The centaurs were drunk, but that only seemed to fuel their strident progress through this labyrinth of a wood.

Something somewhere inside of her snapped. As she collapsed, shredded by pain and thorns and fear, something in her mind tore, just as her tendons had. Clutching the wooden pendant so tightly that the edges of the wood bit into her palms, she recited a simple litany dredged from her childhood memories.

Lying curled up beneath a tree like a wounded spider, she prayed like she had never done in the temples of marble Olympus. The hoofbeats paused. The sound of a reed pipe stole over the suddenly still forest...

She uncurled cautiously and looked around. The centaurs were frozen. One had been caught in mid-stride, hanging in the air with no hooves on the ground. There was no wind. Around it all the ethereal music weaved and writhed, like a mist. From the music formed a voice, soft and distant, as if brought on the wind that no longer stirred.

"Not long." She instinctively knew not to question this, or anything else about the impossible scene. Instead, she hauled herself upright. She looked up at the tree she had fallen against. There was a branch within reach.

As the piping faded, and time flooded back, she clung on to her secret perch and watched as the centaurs charged past, full of rage and wine...



# Incarnates and Reincarnates

## Living

*Are we alive?*

*Of course.*

*We have homes, friends,*

*Even places where we can relax or learn.*

*I would call that living.*

Spirits created in the Maelstrom by the belief of mortals are called Incarnates. On the rare occasions that they cross the Barrier to the Mortal Realms, they appear as angels or demons. Their goal is to become gods themselves. However, these are not the spirits you will normally play in Suzerain: Mortal Realms.

Incarnates spend the bulk of their time in the Maelstrom, their home. If the gods want someone to get a job done in the Mortal Realms, they get an Incarnate to hire a different kind of spirit. That's where Reincarnates come in, and these are the spirits you will generally play in this game.

A Reincarnate is a mortal's soul that does not return to Pulse after the body dies. Instead, the gods intervene and borrow those souls because they are strong enough to cope with the trauma. Tales of reincarnation and past lives are not at all exaggerated for the lucky few, it would seem.

Such spirits are rare, appearing in small groups through history, but represent a great opportunity for gods requiring representation among the mortals. They exist throughout time, and a conscious element of such a spirit could be a suitable minion for the gods of a Dominion.

By utilizing the strength and durability of these spirits, the gods can use Reincarnates to inhabit host bodies in the Mortal Realms and help with stopping the End Times. The host body's soul still resides in its body during the occupation of the Reincarnate. It is possible for the Reincarnate to talk with this person, and even allow the spirit to take control of its body again for a short period of time.

Once the Reincarnate leaves a host body the residual spirit remembers nothing of what has occurred, and is left slightly confused about any missing time. Any damage that is done to the host body during the Reincarnate occupation is visited upon the Reincarnate by the gods when he leaves the host to return to the Maelstrom. After all, the gods are only borrowing the body and therefore won't be best pleased with Reincarnates that allow damage to occur to that body.

The gods have only a limited power over the Mortal Realms. Time there works differently, and they can manipulate it



slightly, but the Universe has a habit of undoing changes they make, returning things to how they were. Subtle things can be changed, almost as if they have to be altered behind the Universe's back. Larger changes seem impossible, especially to the gods. Lesser beings, such as Reincarnates, seem to be able to get away with a lot more.

So the gods send Incarnates out to collect these spirits at the moment of death. The Incarnates bring Reincarnate souls across the Barrier, introduce themselves and explain about the End Times and why they have been taken. They use these spirits to extend their influence into the Mortal Realms, and in return for completing tasks for the gods, the Reincarnates gain Karma.

The players in Suzerain: Mortal Realms play a group of Reincarnate characters that is one such group of strong souls. The representatives of one or more Dominions hire them as trouble-shooters, and off they go - back across the Barrier on a mission from the gods...

## Playing in Suzerain games

### If you are new to role-playing

Welcome to the exciting world of role-playing. Anyone can join in, and you don't need to know anything about this type of game before you start. This section will explain everything you need to get you started and take you through your first game.

#### Overview

Think of role-playing games as an improvised film, TV series, or play. Suzerain: Mortal Realms is a game where you'll need several *players* and one *director*. Each player acts in character for the part that they choose... they play the role of their *character*, hence the name of this type of game.

The director creates the framework for the adventure (a script outline, if you will) and arbitrates what happens once the action begins. Since this is improvised, the action may deviate from the outline the director planned, so this person has to be ready to improvise as needed. The director usually acts any bit parts as needed, too.



**Rule Systems:** How do you decide whether a *character* makes the daring leap that they have just announced they are attempting? How do you know when a *character* hits with the rifle they're firing, or even whether they get the chance before the opponent fires at them? This is what *rule systems* are for, giving simple guidelines for resolving actions that imaginary *characters* (and *extras*) are attempting in an imaginary world. Suzerain games use the House Rules set of rule systems, which are fully described later in this Suzerain: Mortal Realms rulebook.

**Scenario:** A short plot set for a group of *characters* by the *director* in an environment of his choosing. Think of a scenario as a short story. If you string several together with a central plot thread, then they become chapters, while the whole book is the *campaign* (see above). Scenarios may last for one *session*, or many. *Campaigns* may last for years of regular play.

**Session:** An afternoon or evening (normally) get-together for a role-play group. In a *session*, the *director* will generally try to get the *players* (playing their *characters*) to progress the plot a little and leave it at a suitable cliffhanger or conclusion for the next session. This, of course, depends largely on what the *characters* choose to get up to.

## What Suzerain is trying to achieve

The basic premise in Suzerain: Mortal Realms is that players create either a character loosely based on themselves - something called 'avatar gaming' in certain circles, or a totally fictitious one. Either works equally well, though avatar gaming is somewhat simpler for new gamers without losing any of the fun.

These characters are yanked out of the real world (the 'Mortal Realms') and become trouble-shooters for certain gods from various mythologies. The characters are known as *Reincarnates*, since as they travel through various time periods in the Mortal Realms they are effectively reincarnating over and over.

To help them out, the gods give each character a *Telesma*, a magical jewel in the form of a talisman, which grants its wearer certain supernatural powers, or *Arcana*. Armed with a *Telesma* each, the intrepid group of trouble-shooters is returned to one time or another in the Mortal Realms on a mission for the gods...

### As a role-playing game

Suzerain: Mortal Realms counters three of the greatest problems with most role-playing games.

Firstly, it offers a director the opportunity to mix his settings up by changing time periods during a campaign. This allows pretty much any mix of genres to prevent the game from going stale after a few sessions. The characters could get sent to the Wild West one day, to the gothic horrors of Victorian London the next, and then on to



ancient Babylon or the bridge of a spaceship. At the same time, there isn't any requirement to jump around, and a whole campaign can be set in the same place in the same time period because of the flexibility of the Suzerain premise.

Secondly, in *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* characters often get taken back to the Maelstrom at odd moments for further briefing by the gods and Incarnates. This allows different players within a party to play each session, and means that if one regular player can't make it for a session, then the game can go ahead anyway, even if the director left the previous session with that player's character in mid-conversation with an extra. It also means that you can let a potential player try the game out for a session without major upheaval, and that you can even change directors between scenarios but keep the same party.

Thirdly, we overcome one of the greatest bugbears of role-playing - character death - by making it far tougher for a character to die. The body they're inhabiting may die (and even that shouldn't happen too often with the help of the gods), but the character's soul lives on for as long as they have some Karma. Don't think you've got it easy, though. There are plenty of other things to worry about!

As a final comment, *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* has been designed with extremely elegant rules, which allow for an accurate representation of any action a character may want to do, but doesn't get in the way of the role-playing itself. Their simplicity is also good news for people new to this game or new to role-playing in general.

### **As a group of coordinated titles**

*Suzerain: Mortal Realms* is only one of the games based in the *Suzerain* universe. It covers the adventures of Reincarnate characters in the *Mortal Realms* (hence the name). However, this is just one of the titles we have, and we're very proud of them all. Here's a brief overview of some of the other stuff we've done for you:

Fancy playing in the Maelstrom itself, walking among the gods, aspiring to be one of them? Then join the *Suzerain: Eternal Empires* persistent world. Schmooze with Zeus, do dinner with Aphrodite, and raise merry Hel with Thor.

Better than that, you can take your character from *Suzerain: Mortal Realms*, and he can be transferred back and forth between on-line and round-the-table / live-action so you can do gaming between games. Your life doesn't stop between sessions, so why should your character's?

You can also play *Suzerain: Eternal Empires* on its own without cross-over to *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* by creating an Incarnate character on-line. There you have the chance to be an true angel... or a demon, perhaps.

We've written live-action rules as a companion to *Suzerain: Mortal Realms'* round-the-table rules, too. We've put these right here in this book as an extra bit of value for you and



your party. And yes, you can transfer your character between the games and mix it up. Play a session round-the-table on Friday night, take the character to the Maelstrom when you're on the Internet on Saturday, and play live-action with another group on Sunday... all in one campaign!

We think that this mix allows you to play in the Suzerain universe in the way that suits you and, as we add more games, we'll broaden the choices even further for you.

All the latest on the Suzerain universe including art, fiction, new games and new rules is on our web-site. Come on-line and take a look. We're at [www.suzerain.net](http://www.suzerain.net) and we're sure you'll find something you like.

## A few serious words

Suzerain is all about mythology. Some of this can be studied through archaeology as a dry historical pursuit. But somewhere along the line, a lot of real people believed in each god, and it's worth remembering that when getting to grips with Suzerain.

The premise for Suzerain is that the far future has a period called the End Times. It's an apocalyptic, nasty time with little hope, and people clutch at any belief they can for comfort as the Universe comes to a close. In the far future even today's main religions will be nothing more than mythology. There's no point getting upset about it. It's just the nature of things to change and move on.

The thirteen Dominions are based on the misconceptions that people in the far future will have about various mythologies, in the same way that your average man has little real idea of how the Egyptians really worshiped and what they believed in. Heck, even scholars don't fully know what these people believed.

So Suzerain looks at possible interpretations of various beliefs by future generations. Their knowledge of how voodoo worked won't be 100% accurate, so neither is our representation of it. We don't intend it to be. That would be out of character with our central theme. If you're a voodoo priestess then please accept that we've done research and hope we have a realistic framework for the core beliefs, but that we don't intend the flesh on those bones to be realistic (to use an interesting analogy for our example, perhaps).



## Characters at the start

*You believe, therefore they are.*

You are about to create a character that will live and roam a world of its own. This character will become a part of the Suzerain universe and travel across the Barrier to and from an Earth that you may or may not know. It will interact with other characters who you wouldn't meet every day in the real world.

The character you design could have some features and personal traits that you do not possess. The skills and attributes of your character may make it slightly stronger, more intelligent or willful and, through the use of Arcana, have powers equal to your wildest dreams. However, in *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* this character can also be a reflection of you, your personality and background, albeit very heroic in nature.

To give this character life requires a certain amount of belief in the character by you. Within the game you will be the character that you create, just like an actor plays a part on a film set. Based on the abilities you have given your character during its creation, you will make decisions and perform actions that you will have to believe are right for the character.

You have total control over the character, from its creation to its ultimate death (or Ascension to godhood!), and it is you who must breathe life into it within the game. A life that is separate and different from your own.

When you create a character in *Suzerain* you have complete control of who the character is and what they do. Your decisions will shape that character's life and the more you believe in your character, the more important those decisions and their outcome matter, and, ultimately, the more satisfaction you will gain from role-playing.

*Suzerain: Mortal Realms* is a role-playing game. Role-playing is fiction and, in the nature of all fiction, the more involved you get with your character, the more realistic the situation will feel, and the more fun the game will be.



As an aside, the game should feel realistic, but don't ever think that's it's real. When you finish playing a session, put your character away and take up your own life again. The two shouldn't ever get confused. You do not have the supernatural powers that your character has. Please remember that.

Talia stands and watches, mesmerised by the scintillating Barrier, and doubly so by the occasional glimpses of humanity. Finally, seeing her opportunity, she reaches across and moves into the Mortal Realms, where she finds a group of likely candidates for Reincarnate status.

The first of these is Steve, and we'll use his example of character creation throughout this chapter to illustrate the process you should go through to make your own character. When drawing up your own character, feel free to photocopy the character sheet among the colour plates at the back of this book for your personal use and to fill that out. The character sheet makes it easier to keep track of each of the key parts of your character.

## Personality

In *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* you have two options on what character you play. You can play a totally made-up character or play a close approximation to yourself on what is known as an 'avatar' basis. In avatar gaming you play a character based on yourself, albeit put into some incredible situations. The other option allows you to create a whole personality from scratch, which is fun in different ways.

Even in avatar games, you use some poetic license to embellish the truth and to change things around a little bit, but basically you hang on to your own personality and skills as a starting point. This will allow you to get into the role-playing itself quickly and easily without being a professional actor, and it's an avatar character creation that we'll go through here. However, it makes it doubly important that you completely understand the comments from above: once the role-playing starts, this isn't reality any more.

Please note that from now on, you are creating a character that is supposed to be a real person with a personality, we'll refer to that character as 'him'. If you're a woman then he'll be a she, and we don't mean to suggest that female characters are any less valid by not saying 'him/her' every time we refer to your character. It's just a convention to save space in the book. Similarly, we refer to the director as 'her' throughout, but men are just as qualified for the task, of course.



## Attributes

Every character has a core set of attributes, which are numerical representations of that character physically, mentally and socially. These attributes give you an indication of the Reincarnate's personal strengths and weaknesses, such as how strong, how intelligent or how agile the character is.

You assign these attributes a number that becomes the attribute score. This score is used throughout the rules of the game and allows your character to perform and complete actions.

There are nine attributes for a player character, and each attribute follows the guidelines below:

- **Strength** - Your character's ability in all things that involve the physical strength of the body, e.g. lifting and moving objects, holding an opponent, or barging open a door.
- **Agility** - This is your character's ability to react and move quickly, his sense of balance and general nimbleness. Agility is used in helping determine, among other things, how good your character is at dodging out of the way of falling objects and how fast he can run.
- **Constitution** - This is used to determine your character's overall toughness and endurance, e.g. Constitution can be used to determine your character's ability to carry on despite injuries or illness, and to determine how far he can sprint without flagging.
- **Co-ordination** - This is a measure of your character's hand-eye co-ordination and general manual dexterity. The co-ordination attribute is used in helping determine, among other things, your character's chance of picking locks and wielding a weapon effectively.
- **Intelligence** - This is your character's ability to reason and think. Logic problems, research, planning, as well as dredging something out of his memory are all normally intelligence-based actions.
- **Perception** - This is a measure of your character's awareness of events and surroundings. Perception is the main factor used in determining whether he spots a secret door or an enemy lurking in nearby bushes.
- **Willpower** - This is an indication of how far your character can push themselves through doggedness and concentration alone, both physically and mentally. If tortured for instance (gods forbid), willpower will dictate if your character cracks.
- **Wits** - This is a measure of your character's quick thinking and ability to resolve on-the-spot problems without spending too much time thinking about it. Wits may be used when bartering or to detect a con.
- **Charisma** - This is your character's general charm and persuasiveness, and is used in social situations. Whether orating to large crowds or pleading with a child, your character's charisma will have an effect on the outcome.



## Putting numbers to attributes

Everyone is different, which is what makes being human so great, and everyone has different strengths and weaknesses both physically and mentally. This is reflected in your character by the splitting up of the attributes into three broad categories.

Each attribute is assigned a starting value based on which category you chose to place it in. Once you have done this, your character's attributes can be further refined by the use of extra points, as described in the 'rounding your character' section below.

The categories and values assigned are as follows:

- **Strongest** - These are your character's best traits. For an avatar character choose three attributes that you consider are your own best strengths and assign a value of 6 to each one.
- **Weakest** - These are your characters weak spots. For an avatar character choose three attributes that you consider are your own weakest and assign a value of 4 to each one.
- **Average** - These are your characters middle-of-the-range abilities. These three remaining attributes each has a value of 5 assigned to them.

As a guideline, 5 represents the human average in the Suzerain universe. By the time you get to 9, you're a world-ranking athlete, politician or scientist. Einstein and Confucius were 10s in Intelligence, for example, and their reputation lasts for centuries. Only very powerful supernatural beings (potentially your character after many adventures) can have attributes between 11 and 13, which is the maximum a non-god can achieve.

This brings up the interesting question of, "What if I'm physically average, but I want to role-play someone who's a bit stronger than average?"

In an avatar game the basic strengths and weaknesses of your character should mirror those of yourself. On the other hand, this should be fun, so if you reckon that your strength in real life is a 5 but that you'd want to play a 6 or even a 7, then you'll get the opportunity a little later to do that. As long as you assign realistic Strongest, Weakest and Average categories, then the gods will help you out before you're done with character creation.

Using the above method, Steve begins to construct his Reincarnate character. He thinks his strongest attributes in real life are his agility, his co-ordination, and his perception, since he plays a lot of sport. These have a value of 6. He then chooses his weakest attributes - these, he believes are his Charisma, Willpower and Wits - at a value of 4. This leaves his Strength, Intelligence and Constitution at a value of 5.



## Ability modifiers

*Can I read Hleroglyphics?*

*Of course I can...*

*Well, before being hired as a Reincarnate I watched every episode of Stargate.*

Your chance of doing something in the Suzerain universe is based upon the relevant attribute and then gets modified from there. Your knowledge of a relevant skill or ability may give you a positive modifier (technically, ineptitude in an area could give you a negative modifier, but that's for the director to decide).

There are a wide variety of abilities that your character could possess. If you are playing an avatar character, Suzerain: Mortal Realms takes the approach that he starts out knowing the key things that you know yourself. If you're a professional rocket scientist, then you're probably a +3 in rocket science. An amateur photographer on the side? Then you're a +1 in photography... and so is your character as a result. If you are creating a fictitious character then you decide on the abilities and their values based on the background you make up for him.

Each ability your character has will have a value assigned to it based on the level of expertise that the character has in that skill. This ranges from +0 (a basic understanding) to +4 (world expert). There is a level of +5 that represents divine knowledge of a subject, which is available to experienced immortal beings only.

For example, the 'driving' ability would be classed as follows:

- +0 - you have knowledge of what cars are, how to start them, and how to get one moving. However, this is at a basic or theoretical level and you have to hope that your raw co-ordination will get the thing moving properly. You may have passed a driving test, but have little road savvy.
- +1 - you are an inexperienced amateur who happens to use this ability a bit. You have passed a driving test and have some road experience, but apart from a daily commute or shopping run haven't much experience of using a vehicle in adverse conditions or other stressful situations.
- +2 - you are considered a keen amateur. You have passed a driving test and have years of varied road experience, perhaps. You have probably done advanced driving courses to improve your skill.
- +3 - you are a professional. You have passed an advanced driving test and drive various vehicles in a variety of challenging situations for a working living (an army or police driver, for example).
- +4 - you are a respected genius, you may have won world championship races as a rally driver or are renowned amongst your peers (such as a legendary gangland getaway driver!). There is probably only a handful of people with your level of skill in the world.
- +5 - Only powerful supernatural beings have this divine level of ability.



There is also a level called 'no skill' below +0. At this level you have no understanding and can't even rely on your raw attribute to get you through. A stone-age man would have no ability to drive rather than a +0, so couldn't start a car no matter what. You may find your character is in the same situation when it comes to flying a 30th century spaceship that every 30th century teenager can get moving. In such situations, it is for the director to stop you drawing a card at all, preventing you doing any related action. If she doesn't, assume your character is at +0 in that ability.

Steve is now deciding the ability modifiers he will apply to his Reincarnate. Basing these upon himself, he decides that he will have a +2 modifier in Melee, since he fences regularly and has won local prizes. He can speak a little French, so he adds a +1 modifier in Languages. He also works as a computer technician, and therefore adds a +3 modifier in Computers, and another his degree in engineering gives him +2 in Engineering. Finally, Steve feels he rides a motorcycle well, so he adds a +2 modifier in Ride.

### Putting numbers to ability modifiers

As your adventures progress, you may use your Karma to ask the gods for a boost in an ability, to teach your character something more than you as a player know. In that instance, you'll need to write any such abilities on your character sheet so that you don't forget you've got them. That's what the space on the sheet is for.

For now, pick a few abilities that you have and write down the modifier you have for them based on the above rating system. By the way, you won't have any skills at +5, so please don't even try to convince your director that you do!

You may write ten points of ability modifiers on the sheet, representing the things that your character remembers when the gods take him from the Mortal Realms and relocate him.

Don't worry about any +0 abilities, as these are generally accepted as being the standard level for everything. Pick ten points of positive modifiers to help you out instead. Further, don't worry about your native language - your character automatically speaks one language fluently without a problem.

### Abilities

Here is a list of ability types you might have to start with. We cannot hope to cover all the various skills of everyone across the whole of time, so if you come across something not covered below, use this list as a guideline for how broad or narrow your definition of an ability should be.

Most people are better at certain areas of specialisation within an ability, so you



should details which fields of an ability your character knows at that level, and the director may lower your modifier if you are doing something outside of your specialisation but still in the general ability.

Steve's +3 Computers will help him work through a villain's spreadsheets to find the root of their nefarious fraud, but he admits he isn't quite as good in a futuristic cyberspace terminal trying to hack into a secure database. The director only allows him +1 of that +3 for that purpose, better than someone without any computer experience, but not nearly as good as a professional cyberpunk hacker.

**Examples of primarily social abilities:** Negotiation, Leadership, Intimidation

**Examples of primarily mental abilities:** Biology, Computers, Psychology, First Aid, Alertness, Languages, Investigation

**Examples of primarily physical abilities:** Firearms - two handed, Firearms - one handed, Heavy Weapons, Artillery, Drive, Ride, Pilot, Melee - two handed / large weapons, Melee - one handed / small weapons, Brawl, Athletics, Stealth

This is just a small list of the possible abilities there are to take. If you are playing an avatar game then you should be well aware of the abilities you have. If you are not playing an avatar game and you are not a modern character, then your director has the rules for such abilities in section two of this book.

## Dominions

Every Reincarnate starts his career when he is contacted by one of the Dominions. The Olympians, the Valhallans, the Druidic Circle, and the Lords of Persia are just some of the dozen Dominions that are spread across the Maelstrom. There is also a thirteenth Dominion, but who or what they are is a myth even amongst the rest of the Maelstrom dwellers.

The Element wheel among the colour plates at the back of this book shows each of the Dominions and their relation to the others. Around the outside of the wheel are the six light Dominions. The inner circle shows the dark Dominions.



The positioning of the Dominions around the wheel is important. Each Dominion has its allies and its enemies. Around the inner and outer wheel, the Dominions to either side of a particular Dominion are considered allies and there are close links between spirits in the two. They might share Arcana, and it is easier for a spirit to transverse to the allies' Dominion if needed. Reincarnates sponsored by gods from allied Dominions are also more likely to work together when help is needed on particular missions across in the Mortal Realms.

Light and dark Dominions have direct opposites. Spirits from directly opposite light and dark Dominions are likely to consider each other enemies. They're all a little too similar in certain ways, but opposite in others, and there is a deep-rooted distrust that occasionally flares up into direct fighting. However, Reincarnates from different Dominions tend to work together. They may not trust each other, but they are all trying to stop the End Times.

### Choosing a Dominion

*We are not a cult.*

*We are not fanatics.*

*We are here to save mankind from itself.*

*By the absolute control of power.*

*Leader of the Order of Olpath, The Forgotten*

Picking a Dominion for your character will give him access to a Telesma of that Dominion (see below), so the Dominion choice you make now is relevant to your character by deciding what supernatural powers he'll add to his party.

If you are new to Suzerain: Mortal Realms, then we suggest the party your character joins be all from the same Dominion. Although it can be interesting to be involved in a party of mixed Dominions, say Olympians and Valhallans, and having to deal with the consequences of light verse dark, this can be disruptive to the game for newer role-players. Your director will usually have the final say on which Dominions your can have in the group, based on the type of scenario that she has designed.

A full list with Dominion details appears in the Dominion section at the back.

## Creating a Telesma

*Whatever you do DON'T upset a god.*

*You'll be blasted for eternity.*

*Nose-wiping fast track spirits who think they know it all.*

*Spending your time stuck inside some filthy receptacle looking like some piece of cheap jewelry.*

*Trust me ... it's no fun whatsoever.*

*Sansraes, Olympian Incarnate*



Incarnates can have a hard time in the Maelstrom, pandering to their patrons, trying to gain influence in the hope of becoming gods themselves. Sometimes it all goes wrong, and the gods blast the spirit into a pile of sludge which they then scoop up into a small container and hand to a Reincarnate they favour at the time (your character).

Your character carries this container around and uses the Arcana of the former spirit. This talisman is called a 'Telesma', since their remaining essence appears as a strange jewel and is often held in brooches, pendants or rings.

Telesmae retain some of the mental capacity from the former Incarnate but are only semi-intelligent at best, and generally do what they are asked by their owner without question. Casting Arcana they know is the usual task they perform. However, once a Reincarnate and a Telesma join together, they become one symbiotic entity. You can't assign a Telesma to another Reincarnate, and if the Reincarnate goes to Coma (see later) their Telesma may also get hurt, not just the owner.

Each Telesma has several attributes and statistics that are entered on your character sheet that define how useful it is in various fields.

### Elemental attributes

Think of elements as attributes for supernatural powers. Some spirits are particularly good at using Light Arcana, others Stasis Arcana. The following elements are known to exist:

**Light, Dark, Stasis, Change, Essence, Resonance, Vortex, Tide**

Thus there are four pairs, although the link between them is not fully understood. Each has its own arcane symbol to represent it, and each is manipulated differently by the Dominions that use it. There are different Stasis Arcana for the Olympians than for the Valhallans, for example, despite them both sharing knowledge of that element.

All Dominions have the ability to use the Light and Dark elements plus two others. For a list of which Dominions have which elements consult the Dominion section at the back. They also appear on the Dominion Wheel colour plate at the back of this book.

### Putting numbers to elemental attributes

This is very much like assigning the attribute values during Reincarnate character generation. Out of the eight possible elements, each Telesma will have four that are specific for the Dominion that they belong to.

Each Suzerain: Mortal Realms Dominion supplement will give the details for creating Telesmae for that specific Dominion.

However, this rulebook also gives an overview with Dominion descriptions, where you'll see the four elemental attributes



your character's Telesma will have and the starting score for each one.

The character sheet you'll see in the colour plates at the back of this book does have spaces for all the other elements that are available. Elemental attributes that your character's Dominion doesn't use start at 0. Although it may happen that your character is presented with an opportunity for his Telesma to learn Arcana from an element other than the ones specific to their Dominion, this sort of thing is very rare.

### **Pulse**

Pulse is the raw energy of the Maelstrom. It is what fuels a Telesma's capabilities to use Arcana. A Telesma is limited in the amount of Pulse that it can store within itself at any time.

Telesmae begin with a Maximum Pulse attribute of 5, but the Current Pulse value can go up and down based on the use of Arcana (each has a cost to cast, in Pulse) and other factors during the game. Although a Telesma can gain Pulse in various ways, the current amount held cannot exceed that of the Maximum Pulse value. Any Pulse that is collected that exceeds the Maximum Pulse value is lost.

### **Innate abilities**

There are a couple of things that all Telesmae can do which are worth being aware of, but which you don't need to note on your character sheet particularly. The first of these is the ability to cross the Barrier, together with their Reincarnate owner.

Without his Telesma, your character is stuck on whichever side of the Barrier he was on, so he's best off making sure he doesn't lose it!

The second ability is the power to communicate with the memories of mortals. Your character may ask his Telesma to search through the deep memories of the original soul from his inhabited body. This allows the Telesma to find out about who is being inhabited, where they are, what job they do, etc when your character first appears.

Even more useful, the Telesma may store up to two abilities at a basic level (up to +1 only) that the soul knew well (+3 or above). These would normally be things like the ability to speak the native language of the former inhabitant (particularly useful when your character appears in ancient Peru and only speaks English), or the ability to do the job the previous person did at a basic level.

### **Arcana and Conjurations**

Arcana are one of the only things left to a Telesma that makes the blasted spirit of any use to the gods. Telesmae can hardly interact with other spirits. They are barely sentient, as intelligent as a dog or cat at best. The power of a Telesma is in their Pulse and Arcana.

Arcana are supernatural powers taught to spirits by the gods. The teaching of Arcana by the gods (and sometimes by powerful spirits) is not easy, so blasting a spirit and destroying its Arcana would be a waste. Better to force the spirit into a Telesma and let a Reincarnate use it.



Since a Telesma is the remains of an Incarnate, they start with a unique mix of Arcana from their previous existence. Later, by cashing in Karma, your character may also be able to convince the gods to add the knowledge of new Arcana into his Telesma, to increase its maximum Pulse or its elemental attributes.

Conjuring is the knowledge of how to create a physical object from raw Pulse. Such items remain only as long as they stay in contact with your character\*, and even then for only a few minutes at best. Still, knowing that you can always have a knife at hand, no matter what time period you're in, can be very comforting.

\*The exceptions to this are items that have to leave contact to fulfil their purpose. A throwing axe, for instance, will only disappear after it has struck home. If it is dropped, it still disappears instantly, since it isn't fulfilling its purpose at that time. Similarly, a conjured bow may come with a quiver of arrows, but they disappear after they have hit a target, after they are put down, or after a certain period of time, whichever happens first.

Now, Steve has to create his character's Telesma. He has decided that he will be an Olympian Reincarnate. This gives his Telesma the following elemental attributes: Light (4), Stasis (4), Essence (4), Dark (2). See section four for more information on the various Dominions and their elements.

Steve then chooses one Arcana. He chooses Ring of Silence (a Stasis Arcana) but notices two more that he would like to add later: Speed of the Striking Snake (a Dark Arcana, and therefore the Pulse cost to use it is one higher than normal) and the Olympian Gladius Conjuring. The Arcana has a maximum Pulse of 5, and Steve records this on his character sheet.

Telesmae can be played in several ways, they can be played as an inanimate object that has a connection to the character so it can cast Arcana and Conjurations and capture knowledge from Mortals. The other option is to allow them to retain some elements of their former personality that allows the group the option of role-playing the personality of the Telesmae to add flavour to the game.

## Starting Arcana and Conjurations

The Arcana and Conjurations available to each Dominion are different. It is possible for Incarnates to learn those of a different Dominion, but this is rare.

Full details of all Arcana and Conjurations available for each



Dominion will be given as they are published. Those listed below are the common Arcana and Conjuring that all Dominions share to some extent.

Each Arcana and conjuring comes with its own description and rules on its use. You should write down the Arcana or conjuring bought for your character's Telesma and make a quick note of its description and any relevant rules. At this stage you may choose one Arcana or Conjuring from your Dominion list for your character's Telesma to know.

### General Arcana and Conjuring

Each Dominion has knowledge of all of those Arcana below that are from the four elements they use and the one Conjuring (number 3 below). However, their knowledge of general Arcana from their opposed element (light if it's a dark Dominion and vice versa) is imperfect, and the cost to use those Arcana is increased by 1.

1. **Ascent:** Costs all current Pulse, *Change* action - user or willing Reincarnate being touched by user is safely returned to the Maelstrom immediately, returning the body they were in to its true owner.
2. **Confuse:** Cost 2, *Vortex* Action versus target's wits. A target who makes eye contact with the user is totally confused for 1 round per net Vortex grade. The more net Vortex grades, the more complete the confusion.
3. **Conjure dagger:** Cost 0, automatic action - user concentrates for 10 seconds and conjures a small blade (about 4 inches long) which remains solid while held and lasts for 1 minute before dissipating. The blade is a standard dagger and if used in a fight inflicts its user's strength in damage per grade success.
4. **Darkness:** Cost 1, *Dark* action - creates a 3 metre radius sphere of total darkness around a fixed point within line of sight for a few seconds (one round) per Dark grade.
5. **Detect Lie:** Cost 2, *Light* action - the user can tell what's a lie and what's not for a few seconds (one round) per Light grade from any words spoken by one target being.
6. **Entangle:** Cost 2, *Stasis* action - covers one target within user's line of sight with invisible netting. To break free, the target must succeed in an opposed strength action versus the Stasis grades the user got when using entangle.
7. **Examine Soul:** Cost 3, *Essence* action - user sees the nature of the soul of one nearby target within line of sight. The more Essence grades, the better idea what sort of soul (if any) that body has, what mood they're in, etc.
8. **Heal:** Cost 2, *Light* action - target is healed 5 current health per Light grade when the wound is touched by the user, up to their maximum health.
9. **Illuminate:** Cost 1, *Light* action - creates a 10 centimetre sphere of light at a point within the user's line of sight for 5 minutes. The more Light grades the user gets, the brighter the light and the more control the user has over the source (whether it's a globe, a spotlight, whether it can move, etc).
10. **Lucky Strike:** Cost 1, *Tide* action - user gets +1 modifier to one strike per three Tide grades.
11. **Mental Shield:** Cost 2, *Vortex* action - user, or willing target within line of sight, is immune to all Arcana or supernatural powers for ten minutes that do not get more grades in their use than the Vortex grades of the mental shield.



12. **Mind Blast:** Cost 2, opposed *Dark* action vs. target's Intelligence - when touched by the user, the target suffers mental shock damage of 10 times the net *Dark* grades. If this takes the target to less than 1 current health, then they collapse unconscious at 1 health instead.
13. **Persuasion:** Cost 2, opposed *Resonance* action versus target's Willpower - One target in eye contact with the user must follow the next simple command the user makes. The more net *Resonance* grades the user gets, the more that command may be against the nature of the target being and still be followed. It would generally take 10+ net grades to get a target to kill themselves, for instance, but only 3+ if they were on the verge of suicide anyway.
14. **Ring of Silence:** Cost 1, *Stasis* action - creates a sphere of total silence around the user. The radius (in meters) and duration (in rounds) of the sphere add up to the *Stasis* grades the user gets - thus 7 *Stasis* grades could be 3 meters for 4 rounds or 6 meters for 1 round, etc.
15. **Seeker:** Cost 2, opposed *Essence* action versus target's willpower - user knows where (within 1km) the target is, the knowledge updating as the target moves. The more net *Essence* grades the user gets, the more detailed the position knowledge is. The effect lasts for one minute.
16. **Shield:** Cost 1, *Resonance* action - all physical strikes against the user for the remainder of the round do half damage.
17. **Speed of the Striking Snake:** Cost 1, *Dark* action - the user gets to take a second action this round without penalty. If the user gets 5+ *Dark* grades, then the action takes place when the *Arcana* is cast, otherwise it takes place at the end of the round. The use of this *Arcana* is not counted as an action, but must be announced and resolved at the start of a round.
18. **Telekinesis:** Cost 3, *Change* action - user can slowly move an object by thought alone, as long as they concentrate on it and it stays within line of sight, that weighs up to 1kg per *Change* grade.

## Rounding your character

Once your basic character is drawn up and you have a Telesma, you have a further opportunity to enhance your character's statistics a little further. As a new Reincarnate in the employment of the gods (whichever set it happens to be), your character can call on them for a few favours before going on his first mission.

To represent this, you have some Karma to spend as detailed below, and this can be split how you like within the limits mentioned. If you have more than 25 points of Karma left at the end of character creation, then this excess is lost, and you start with 25 Karma, so it's worth using most of it up now.

### Karma

Karma is the backbone of all Reincarnates. As your character progresses through the game he will (hopefully) gain Karma, often as a reward from his patron god for progression or



successful completion of a mission in the Mortal Realms. The importance of the mission, as well as how well it was carried out, reflect the amount of Karma rewarded. There are other ways of gaining Karma, such as owning prestigious relics, but success in missions is the primary way of gaining respect in the eyes of your character's gods.

The more Karma your character gains, the more influence he has among the gods, and given 500 Karma the gods would give your character the opportunity to change into an Incarnate spirit (an angel of that Dominion), an act known as Transformation.

Karma, however, serves a more immediate purpose. As influence among the gods it can be called upon and used up to ask for favours - everything from saving the character's life in an otherwise hopeless situation through to teaching the character new abilities, which is what you'll be using your initial Karma for.

### **Enhancing attributes, abilities and your Telesma**

Your character starts with 100 Karma that can only be spent improving your character's attributes (strength, constitution, agility, co-ordination, intelligence, perception, wits, willpower, and charisma). The cost in Karma to increase attributes is five times the score you want to go to. Thus, improving your character's Strength from 5 to 6 would cost 30 Karma and then 35 more to enhance it from 6 to 7. If you had an average strength (5), it would therefore cost your character a total of 65 Karma to enhance that to 7. However, none of your character's attributes may start higher than 7. Any Karma you have left over goes to your starting Karma, and can't be used in the other stages below.

Steve's character goes through the rounding off stages, during which he gets the chance for his Telesma to be taught that extra Arcana and Conjuring he wanted, as well as raising some attributes and learning a few new tricks.

This stage has allowed Steve to make his character a little bit different to himself as a player, although still based on the person he is in real life. He's now got +2 in Martial Arts that Steve never got round to learning as a person but the gods have seen fit to teach him. His character has more Willpower (Steve used some of his Karma to increase the attribute from 4 to 6).

As Talia looks on, she's content that Steve will make a good Reincarnate, now that he's blessed by the gods of Olympus.

Your character has another 100 Karma to spend enhancing their Telesma before play starts. The Telesma's attributes (maximum Pulse, and the four elemental attributes for your character's chosen Dominion) are enhanced exactly as your character's (see above), with the same starting limit of 7. Arcana and Conjurations are not easy to teach Incarnates once they have been blasted into Telesmae, though. For



the gods to teach a Telesma new Arcana or Conjurings, the cost depends on how common that power is. All the general powers are common, and as such cost 20 Karma to teach. Remember that gods will only teach those general Arcana that relate to elements of their Dominion. Uncommon powers cost 40 Karma to learn, while rare Arcana and Conjurings cost 80 Karma to learn. Some uncommon Arcana are shown in the Dominion by Dominion write up of section three, but rare Arcana will be a part of later supplements. Once again, any Karma you have left over goes to your starting Karma, and can't be used in the last stage below.

Finally, your character also starts with 100 Karma to spend improving and learning new abilities. This works in a similar way to enhancing Attributes, although the cost is eight times the modifier you want to go to. Thus, asking the gods to teach you +1 in archery would cost 8 Karma, but going from +1 to +2 would cost 16 Karma, and if you wanted the gods to make you a pro then rising from +2 to +3 would cost 24 Karma. Going from no skill to +0, where your director deems it appropriate, costs 4 Karma. Note that you cannot start the game with any ability at +5 - you'll need to earn that during play. As before, any Karma you have left over goes to your starting Karma, and if your starting pool would be over 25 Karma, then it is capped at 25 now.

## Health

The final stage in creating your character is to work out the value for your character's health trait. This is used as a guide to the current status of your character in regards to his ability to move and act. At full health, your character can act using their full abilities and skills with no penalties. However, when your character suffers damage this will lower his current health and have an effect on their ability to act.

Your character's maximum health is worked out as follows:

**Maximum Health = 10 x Constitution**

This value is his maximum Health and cannot be raised or lowered except in exceptional circumstances, such as Karma spent improving his constitution attribute. The current value of your character's health this can go up or down, but it cannot go above the maximum value and when it goes to zero ... well, things get very serious for your character indeed.

In Suzerain: Mortal Realms your Reincarnate character spends most of their time inside a body from a past or future time period. If the body becomes damaged then the Reincarnate inhabiting it is also damaged, and will keep all damage done to it during its occupation. If major damage is done to the body then the gods visit that damage upon the Reincarnate as punishment, so your character should beware and take care of the bodies he inhabits.



## Characters during play

*The rules are simple.  
Do to those,  
Before they do to you.*

*The Spirit Tagoth, on hitting an opponent*

Sometimes a character will attempt to do something, whether that is a character that a player controls or one represented by the director, and the outcome of that activity will be important to the game.

In such situations, where the outcome is not clear, Suzerain uses a system called House Rules to determine how things turn out. However, before getting into the rules for playing the game, a quick word about the main rule.

## The Main Rule

All the rules below are really only suggestions on how to play the game and to resolve unclear situations. It is always far more rewarding to role-play a situation rather than resort to the Randomiser deck. However, when a Randomiser is required, the House Rules are designed as guidelines for most situations a character winds up in. A good director will always remember the following:

Let your role-playing dictate the rules, don't let the rules control your role-playing.

## House Rules

We are all doing things every day of our lives. Making a cup of tea, eating a pie, driving a car, even standing up and running are all activities you might do. Your character can perform most activities that you can think of.

Most of the times when you want your character to do something, they will be able to do it with no problem at all. It is only when your character is attempting something that is beyond their skill, or might involve a degree of luck, that it gets more complicated. It is at this point that you use the Randomiser deck to determine the success or failure of the action. At this point an action becomes an Action as described below.



The director will determine when an Action is appropriate. Making that cup of tea, for example, is a straightforward activity that almost anyone can do. You just tell the director what you want to do and then carry on.

It is only when complications start creeping in that it might become necessary to use a Randomiser to complete an Action. Making that cup of tea in less than two minutes on a tight rope with one hand tied behind your back, now that's a challenge...

The other time it becomes useful to draw a Randomiser is if you need to know how well the character did in an Action (where only a really, really good cup of tea will impress the Mad Hatter enough for him to help you in your adventure).

A good rule of thumb is that if an activity is *globally important* or its outcome is *contested*, then an Action is required. The game is frozen while the director and the characters involved sort out the effects of the Action. Once resolved, normal role-play resumes.

Where there is contention as to the *order of events* in a globally important activity, where the outcome is contested, then a *Complex Action* is required and again, the game is frozen while the director resolves it.

A director learns with experience what constitutes a globally important activity and when the outcome is likely to be contested. Although it is better to role-play than to lose time resolving rules, it is better to work through the rules so everyone is happy with the results than have somebody unhappy about an assumed outcome to an easy activity.

At the core of House Rules' Action system is a regular deck of cards. This game does not use dice to simulate chance as a lot of role-playing game systems do, but instead uses a standard deck of playing cards that are available just about anywhere. In House Rules these are the Randomisers we talk about.

### Using the Randomiser deck

The Randomiser deck can be used in a variety of ways, and the players will draw cards from the deck as necessary and usually as told by the director. The players can expect to have to draw from the deck for the following reasons, among others:

**Completing an Action:** Whenever a character needs to complete an Action that does not have a clear cut outcome, then the director will ask you to draw a Randomiser and do a Check against a Target Class. This will determine not only if your character manages to complete the Action but also, potentially, how well they succeeded or how badly they failed (the Action's Success Grade or Failure Grade). All these terms are explained in more detail in a moment.

**Resolving Complex Actions:** When a character wants to



do something and another character is trying to do something at the same time, and the order they are resolved in is important, then an Initiative score is used to determine which happens first, and a Complex Action is the result. At this point the game uses Rounds of actions.

**Random Events:** At any point in the game the director may have a decision to make that is not necessarily clear, or where the outcome could be totally random. To quickly resolve such situations, the director may draw a Randomiser himself, or ask a player to draw a Randomiser. The director uses this as a guide to what happens next. There is no reason why the director has to say why they are drawing, or getting a Player to draw a Randomiser. There may well be a valid reason. Then again, there may not and the Players will be left guessing.

Talia finishes recruiting her party of worthy heroes, made up of Steve, Jenny, Tim, and Kate.

The play group meets at Jenny's for their first session. The four players have all gone through character creation, and the director has set the scene, with their recruitment by Talia, their introduction to the gods, and the briefing to their first mission. When Talia (played by the director) thinks that her party is ready, they crosses the Barrier, and into the mists on the other side.

The Reincarnates enter the bodies of various people who the Olympian gods have arranged to be in the Cleopatra's palace, as promised during their briefing. This happens automatically, and no rules are applied. The role-playing goes on uninterrupted, with the director setting the scene:

*"You appear to be in a long corridor, partly lit by torches along the ornate walls, but quickly dipping into darkness in both directions. It appears that you are standing in front of a pair of beautifully-engraved doors, with braziers either side lighting the scene and giving off warmth."*

**Jenny:** Are we all here?

**Director:** There are three people here other than yourself. Looking closely, you see beyond the face-paint and robes of one and spot similarities to Steve. A second, apart from the crafted leather armour, shield and sword, is clearly Tim in another life. The third could be Kate, except for the loose-fitting rags and scar across her left cheek.

**Steve:** Right, let's get this over with. I open the door.

**Jenny:** Wait a minute. What do I look like?

**Director:** Tim, you see Steve and Kate, as I've already described. The other person you see is wearing a bloodstained apron and carrying a wicked-looking



barbed stick, but it's Jenny under all the grime.

**Jenny:** Charming.

**Director:** As for you, Tim, the doors are very heavy and will be tough to open. That'll need an Action to succeed...

Because this is not a guaranteed success, the director has asked Steve to do an Action to open the door first time. Note that if time were not a factor, she'd let Steve succeed automatically, saying merely that 'after a moment or two you get the door open'. However, she knows that if he fails first time, the people inside the room will be alerted to the characters' presence, and that will change things when they do get in.

### Play deck and discard pile

At the start of each game session, the director shuffles the Randomiser deck and then deals Fate cards to each player depending on their character's rank. For groups of up to six players, a normal deck of cards is enough to give each player their card/s and leave a reasonable amount left over. If there are more players in the group then it is recommended that you put two decks together. The remains of the Randomiser deck are placed in easy reach of all the players and become the play deck.

Note that we recommend the director use a Randomiser deck of their own for any Actions by characters that the players do not control, so they have their own play deck.

Whenever the director calls for a character to draw a Randomiser, the player that controls him draws from the top of the play deck. The Randomiser is then discarded, face up, in a discard pile. If the play deck ever runs out of cards, then the discard pile is turned over, shuffled, and becomes the play deck.

### Actions

Characters have attributes, such as strength and perception. These are abstracted as numbers, where the human range is from 1 to 10, with 10 being very rare and the highest any normal person can aspire to.

To calculate whether an Action succeeds, the person controlling the character who's acting draws a Randomiser, adds the number on it to the relevant attribute, and aims to get a total of 12 or more.

12 is for average Actions, and is the default difficulty. The director may dictate that a particular Action is hard or easy



instead of average difficulty, in which case he changes the difficulty and the target number changes as follows. There are five levels of difficulty:

**Easy** (target 10)

**Average** (default: target 12)

**Hard** (target 14)

**Very Hard** (target 16)

**Hardest** (target 18)

### Director: ...*It's a strength Action.*

Note that because it is of average difficulty, as most Actions are, the director does not need to say that explicitly. If it had been particularly tough to open, she might have said, "It's a Hard strength Action," letting Steve know that his total for attribute plus Randomiser needed to be 14 or above rather than 12.

Steve draws a 7, to add to his strength of 5, giving him 12. The Action succeeds and he gets the door open, surprising the occupants of the room.

Certain things may modify the total a character gets from their attribute plus Randomiser, such as abilities, equipment and other factors. This gives us the all-in-one rule of Actions:

### **Attribute + Randomiser +/- Modifiers versus Difficulty**

The last thing to be aware of is that occasionally the director will want to know how well an Action succeeded or how badly it failed. If so, then the number by which the character's total exceeded or fell short of the difficulty is the success grade or failure grade respectively. Each success grade or failure grade is by ranks of 1 over or under the Action

As Steve puts his weight behind the doors to lever them open, Kate announces that she's listening for any sounds. The director decides that this is a Hard perception Action (since she has to listen over the top of Steve's grunting). She has perception of 7, draws a 9, giving a total of 16. 14 would have barely succeeded, 15 would have



given a grade one success, so with 16 Kate has a grade two success.

The director has already decided that with a grade one success Kate would make out the sounds of a scuffle going on inside, while with a grade two success she'd also hear the sounds of people moving down the corridor towards them, chatting, giving early warning that some guards are coming on their regular patrol.

### Fate Cards

Fate cards represent the moments when the gods choose to help Reincarnates in times of desperate need. The gods have seen that the character is in trouble and have chosen to change the outcome for the better.

At the start of each session the director deals out random card(s) to each player depending on their rank. The cards a player holds in their hand can be used during the game to change the result of a drawn Randomiser from the Play Deck. For particularly important Actions, a player might decide that they need to succeed and therefore chooses to over-write the Randomiser with a better card from their hand. Players cannot however change a naturally drawn 1 because a 1 is always a failure.

You can also use fate cards to change a draw by the director so that she fails in an action, as long as that action was against your character specifically. If the card(s) you hold in your hand are low values then these are the best ones for this purpose.

After being used, fate cards are discarded along with the Randomiser they replaced. Thus, each player starts the game with a number of cards and this will diminish as the cards are used. Fate cards are always drawn again at the start of each session; they are not carried over into the next one. It is recommended that players also be allowed to refresh their hand after every 2-3 hours of play when you take a suitable break in any long sessions.

Tim and Kate attempt to hide in the shadows before the guards arrive. The director decides that this corridor is well lit and it will be a Hard action. Tim and Kate therefore need a 14 to succeed. Tim has an Agility of 5 and +1 Stealth ability. However he only draws a 3 as a Randomiser which gives him a score of 9 and a big failure.

Tim is holding a 10 as a Fate card and he can throw it in now for a score of 16, which gives a grade two success. Kate however succeeds in her hide, but when the director draws a card to determine if she's spotted by the approaching guards, a 12 is drawn. Kate realises that this will probably succeed and plays a 2 from her hand to replace the guard's card, which is far less likely to succeed.



## Abilities

Characters may have a particular skill or aptitude in an area of expertise that is relevant to an Action. Such abilities are rated between +1 and +4 (+5 in very rare circumstances) and act as modifiers.

On the other side of the coin, characters may have flaws or ineptitude in an area, which would be rated between -1 and -4 modifiers (-5 in very rare circumstances).

## Equipment

The equipment you use for an Action can drastically change the chances of success, as well as what happens when you succeed. A director will normally assign details to a piece of equipment as necessary, but here are some examples to think about:

**Weapons:** A dagger or knife does *(strength)* damage per grade success while an average sword from the middle ages does *(strength + 5)* damage per grade success and a modern pistol inflicts *10* damage per grade success. These damages are compared to an unarmed attack which will do *(half character's strength)* damage per grade success. As you can see, getting hit by a big weapon will quickly finish off most characters, especially if they hit in a vital part of their body (high grade success).

None of these can modify your chance of success, but the better the success, the more damage. In fact, ranged weapons such as pistols and bows have to contend with range issues. Beyond short range a shot becomes one difficulty harder, two beyond medium range. Thus an average shot with a pistol may suffer no penalty up to 8 meters, becomes a hard Action between 8 and 15 metres (target 14) and very hard above 15 metres (target 16).

The director can decide what the break points between the different ranges are for each such weapon.

Type	Damage/grade	Range (s/m/l)	Rate
Punch	(Str/2)	NA	1
Club	(Str)	NA	1
Knife	(Str)	NA	1
Gladius	(Str+3)	NA	1
Sword (long)	(Str+5)	NA	1
Revolver	10	<5m/5-10m/>10m	1
Pistol (Auto)	10	<5m/8-10m/>10m	2
Shotgun	20	<3m/3-5m/>5m	1
Musket	15	<3m/3-5m/>5m	1/5*
SMG	15	<10m/10-20m/>20m	3
Machine Gun	25	<20m/20-50m/>50m	5

Rate represents the amount of times that weapon can be used each round, however each action above the first suffers the penalties for multiple actions described below.

\* The Musket can only be fired once every 5 rounds



**Armour:** To stop taking so much damage, a character may wear armour. This stops the first few points of damage each time the character is hit, but may give the character a negative modifier to all agility Actions, since a lot of armour is very difficult to move around in. Shields stop a little damage automatically, too, but are best when the user concentrates on parrying an opponent's strike. Armour may be anything from medieval chainmail (*10 points of armour, -1 to agility Actions*) and full platemail (*30 points of armour, -3 to agility Actions*) to modern day flak jackets (*15 points of armour, no negative modifiers*) and riot shields (*5 points of armour, may parry all strikes*).

**Accessories:** To continue our examples of aggressive equipment, a scope on a rifle may add a +1 modifier to a character trying to fire a rifle at long range. However, please note that not all equipment has a modifier attributed to it. Smoke grenades, for example, have an effect that may make the area where they land smoky, and the smoke might make a shot with a rifle through it hard (target 14) rather than average (target 12) difficulty. It's up to the director to judge.

Combat is a Complex Action, and is described in detail in its own section below.

## Factors

Any modifier that isn't from an ability or from equipment is from a Factor. All sorts of different factors may affect a character's performance of an Action. As with most other modifiers, factors can be positive or negative depending upon the situation dictated by the director.

Tim elects to use his Darkness Arcana to help Kate and him hide. If the Arcana works properly, he'll immerse the whole area in total blackness, helping them significantly and increasing the difficulty of any perception attempt by the guards. In *Suzerain: Mortal Realms*, Arcana are a common type of factor since their results frequently modify other Actions.

## Some examples of useful Action variants

**Opposed Actions:** Instead of having a difficulty, the difficulty of one character's Action is the total of another's. In an arm-wrestling contest, for instance, both participants may be doing a strength Action, where the greater grade success wins. In a game of hide and seek, one character is doing a wits Action to hide. Their total (wits plus Randomiser plus modifiers) is the difficulty of the seeker's perception Action.

These are two slightly different examples of Opposed Actions.



**Joint Actions:** More than one character may help in finishing an Action. If two people try to lift a tree trunk, they both do a strength Action and their grade success is add together. The director decides what combined grade they require to succeed.

### Complex Actions

Things only get complicated in the game when characters start to try and do different things as the same time. At this point, the director should slow the pace down and split the game into a series of Actions. The period that it takes for everyone to do one Action is called a Round.

While playing the game, a Round may take a few minutes to play depending on the number characters involved, but in game terms only a few seconds pass for the characters per Round. Think of the game as going into slow motion so that everyone can see all the details of the situation. In situations where you might all die, this allows you the opportunity to resolve the situation to the best of your characters' abilities.

### Initiative

The order that people's Actions happen in any given Round is decided by people's Initiative. At the start of each Round of the Complex Action, each character figures their Initiative as their wits plus Randomiser plus any Modifiers. These Initiatives are used throughout that Round, then calculated afresh for the next Round, if there is one.

Starting at highest Initiative, the director counts down. A character may carry out an Action when their Initiative comes up or hold back and do an Action at any time thereafter. No character may do more than one Action per Round, which is the amount of time it takes for an average participant to do an Action. Once everyone has taken an Action or declined to do so, then the round is over and another one starts as necessary.

### Modifiers to Initiative

There are two basic types of modifier to initiative checks.

The first is based on surprise, where an ambush has been set, for example. In such a situation, all the surprised combatants get a negative modifier to their Initiative for the first round of combat, if the director lets them act at all in that Round. A -10 modifier would be appropriate for almost total surprise. Any character who's final Initiative is zero or less wouldn't get to act that Round.

The second common type of modifier is based on the equipment used. Wielding a two-handed sword is a slow business, and as such a director may add a negative modifier to a character's Initiative for the Round in which they intend to attack with such a weapon. -5 Initiative for such a huge blade would not be unreasonable.

### Some examples of useful Complex Action variants

**Extended Actions:** A character may take more than one round to finish an Action. During this time, they can do nothing else, and if they are interrupted they may have to start afresh later. The director may judge that it takes more than one round to



complete an Action if that takes longer than the average Action takes. Thus, reloading a shotgun may take two Rounds, according to the director, as all other characters are merely pulling the trigger on their weapons, which allows them to fire twice in the same time.

Alternatively, the Extended Action may be split into several Actions. If climbing a cliff, the director may split it into four sections and require a success on each part... where 5 Failure Grades would have the character slip from that point and 1-4 Failure Grades leaves the character hanging, trying that stage again. Eventually, if the character doesn't make it up, then fatigue will start to take an effect...

## Combat

*The End Times are upon us.  
We have to stand our ground and fight  
Or their ignorance will destroy us,  
And if that means spilling blood  
Then so be it.*

*Callum of Thor, Valhallan Incarnate*

There will come a time in any game where all the different options have been exhausted and you are left with nothing more than rolling up your sleeves and taking the bad guy on face to face. Combat in Suzerain: Mortal Realms should be viewed much as it is in everyday life, as a last resort. There is nothing fantastic or cool about picking up a long bladed weapon or a gun and trying to do harm to your opponent. It might all come down to defending yourself, but if your character gets into a fight then expect him to get hurt. Weapons, especially modern weapons, are usually lethal with one or two strikes and combat in Suzerain: Mortal Realms reflects this. If your character is involved in a fight, expect it to be quick, violent, and quite often deadly.

Supernatural beings and Reincarnates themselves tend to be even more lethal as fighters, as they have the ability to increase a weapon's potential damage with the use of Arcana.

### Overview

When characters are involved in combat then the game must change to reflect various abilities and skills of the characters and their opponents. This is done by changing the flow of the game from free-form interaction to a system of Rounds. Thus, combat is a Complex Action.

Characters decide Initiative when combat begins, and the director slows game down for the first Round. The



character with the highest Initiative will have the option to act first in the Round followed by the combatant with the next highest score, and so on until all characters have had a chance to perform an Action.

It is possible to split actions in a Round. This can only be done once giving the maximum Actions per Round of two. Because you are trying to fit two quick Actions into the same time period the difficulty for both is increased. The first Action is 1 level of difficulty higher, for example a 12 becomes a 14. The second action occurs at 2 levels of difficulty higher, for example a 12 becomes a 16. These modifiers are applied to what ever base difficulty the director sets. This can mean that certain actions are virtually impossible, which reflects somebody trying to do something very difficult in record time.

Although non-violent Actions can be performed during combat, normal combat Actions involve one character attempting to harm another. If your character successfully hits another then damage will be done and the opponent will lose a certain amount of points from their current health score. If a character's current health reaches zero then they have been killed or, in the case of Reincarnates, the body they inhabited has died and they are returned to the Maelstrom to face the wrath of their gods.

### Performing Actions in combat

People are fantastically inventive when it comes to thinking of things to do and ways to do them. In combat, with life itself on the line, this is doubly true. However, the two things that people do more than anything else in combat is attack someone (performing a Strike) and defend against an attack (performing a Defence).

**Strikes:** A strike is a co-ordination Action, whether it's throwing a punch or firing a gun. The grade success of a strike dictates how good a hit the strike was, and dictates how much damage is done. Different weapons have different damage ratings (see above under equipment) and may have modifiers to the Action too - for instance, ranged weapons such as the pistol described above, get negative modifiers at longer ranges.

**Defences:** Instead of attacking or doing anything other Action in a Round, a character may elect to defend against a Strike. When the character's Initiative comes up, instead of doing anything else, they defer their Action until they are attacked and then announce that they're defending against that Strike. Note, once the Strike starts being resolved it's too late to announce a defence.

Of course, if they don't get attacked that Round (or if they don't figure any of the attacks are a major threat) then at the end of the Round they can still announce a Strike themselves before the Round is finished.

Defences are an agility Action, which represents the character dodging, ducking, or diving for cover (players should describe what their character is doing to defend themselves). Each grade success in the defence nullifies one grade success on the appropriate Strike. Any extra successes that they get after nullifying the first attack



get taken away from any subsequent ones. This represents a character trying to avoid being hit several times or by multiple attackers by just getting out of the way.

As a special case of defence, a character may attempt to Parry a hand-to-hand Strike with an item they are carrying (ranged Strikes such as firearm shots and flying arrows cannot be parried, except by especially skillful martial arts experts or people wielding purpose-made shields, no matter what cartoons show).

Parrying is a co-ordination Action, and each grade success deflects one grade success on the appropriate Strike. Shields are the best at this, being designed specifically for it. The user of a shield has the option to parry or soak with a shield. The shield soaks damage automatically when the wielder is hit unless they choose to parry with it instead.

The danger with parrying is that, unless the parrying item is a purpose-built shield, and therefore strapped to the user's arm, 2 or more grades failure in the parry Action would mean the user drops that item... which can be a real downer if it's their weapon.

### Modifiers to combat Actions

Assorted ability, equipment and factor modifiers may affect combat Actions, just like any other. A skill in archery will give a positive modifier to bow strikes, while a telescopic sight on a rifle may give a positive modifier to strikes with that weapon, and certain Arcana will also affect strikes or defences.

The director should bear in mind all the features of a particular combat when calculating difficulties. Attacking from lower ground may give a hard difficulty, and firing at a target that is particularly small (such as a person half-hidden by a wall or aiming at their head specifically) will increase the difficulty still more.

Conversely, attacking an immobile target lowers the difficulty and the director may even forego the formalities and impose automatic maximum damage of a grade 13 success on the target. Someone who's tied up is in no position to stop the enemy with the Uzi from turning them into a lump of dead meat, after all.

A character must be aware of the strike happening in order to be able to mount a defence against it or to parry it. Unless someone else warns a character, then all strikes from behind cannot be defended against. Attacks from the side can be defended against, but the director may impose a higher difficulty to the defence Action.

Aimed blows or shots are at -5 initiative but +1 modifier. Quick strikes (snapshots) are at +5 initiative but -1 modifier. The director may come up with many other variants on combat Actions, since combat is a varied subject, and she should also adjudicate any special Actions your character may want to take.



## Getting hurt

Whether inflicted through combat, a long fall, or disease, damage is a loss of health and is recorded on the character sheet as a running total. As the character takes damage, their ability to act and complete Actions diminishes. There are two simple stages where the loss of health will affect the character.

**Half health** - Once the character drops below half their original health score, then each of the character's Actions is performed at one higher difficulty level. Average becomes hard. Hard becomes harder. And so on. The character also gets a -5 initiative modifier.

**Quarter health** - Once the character drops below quarter their original health score, then each of the character's Actions is performed at two higher difficulty levels. Easy becomes hard. Average becomes harder. Hard becomes hardest. Forget anything tougher than that. The character gets a -10 initiative modifier.

### Death and the Maelstrom

Mortals will die when their bodies are subjected to massive amounts of damage. Incarnate and Reincarnate spirits can also die, in a sense, when they suffer excessive loss of health. The processes for each are slightly different and Incarnates will be dealt with in detail in a future supplement.

When a mortal is reduced to zero or less health, they are unconscious and will die very quickly unless they receive adequate medical aid. A character reduced to such a state will lose one more health every minute. Once they have a negative health equal to their constitution score, someone must successfully administer some first aid or uses an Arcana to save them since the loss of even one more health will kill them. If the damage taken from the initial wound is enough to take them to this point, then they are killed outright immediately without the unconscious stage.

If a first aid attempt is a success, then the character is stable, goes to zero health, and wakes up. The character is not safe by any means though. Any more damage received will start the process all over again. Once first aid has been administered in this way to save a dying character, it can't be used again to increase the character's health above zero. Either the character must receive aid from a more qualified professional or must be moved to somewhere with better facilities.

Reincarnates whose inhabited body dies are returned to the Maelstrom in a state of Coma.

### The Effects of Coma

Although a Reincarnate character cannot die easily, it is possible for it to end up trapped in Coma for some time. The character's gods will get the Reincarnate out of Coma, and will return them to the Mortal Realms at the start of the next play session with the rest of their group (their player can serve the munchies and drinks for the rest of this session). However, the character takes permanent shock damage from each Coma they enter, and they permanently lose one



point from a random Attribute of theirs or their Telesma each time. For this purpose there are 13 attributes: four physical, four mental, one social and four Telesma elemental attributes. You can use a Randomiser to decide where the loss occurs.

Even with the Coma resolved, the gods have the problem of dealing with a dead body that was inhabited. Their only option is to meddle hugely with the laws of the universe and reverse the course of history at the point that the fatal damage was taken. A fluke but explainable occurrence of some description stops the worst of the damage (for the director to decide something relevant at the time). The body falls unconscious and remains that way until the Reincarnate can get back to it at the start of the next session.

Don't even ask about the cosmic backlash the gods suffer from such time tampering in the Moral Realms. They're wrath with Reincarnates who make them do this is legendary, and the director may wish to role-play extra penalties or assign Karma loss based on the amount of blame the character should take for the 'death' of their inhabited body. 5 Karma is appropriate for a character where they weren't really at fault, 10 Karma if they clearly bore some blame, but there were mitigating circumstances, and 15 Karma lost is not inappropriate where the character can only blame themselves (and take all of the blame from their gods).

### Healing

Human bodies heal slowly from major wounds and illnesses. With full rest a person will regain 2 health per day for the first week, then 2 health per week after that until fully healed. Without full rest this drops to 1 health each time, with no healing taking place if the character continues to try and lead a full and active lifestyle.

Fortunately, medical aid can help out significantly. Access to futuristic health packs, modern hospital facilities, and even rough and ready medieval bandages will all help out, dependent on the skill of the doctor administering to the patient. If the skill of the doctor is not known, then a fair guideline is that with minimal help (medieval practice or first aid kit only) a person will regain one extra health each time. Good modern hospitals will instead add three extra health.

Futuristic facilities may add as much as the director dictates, but five extra health each time is not inappropriate. If mixed treatments are given, only the best is applied - the rest are redundant.

### Dissolution of the soul

If a Reincarnate character ever gets any Attribute that would drop below 1 (generally from coming out of Coma too many times) then his soul simply fails to wake from Coma as it is no longer a complete being. This is the only way a Reincarnate character can truly, permanently die, but is certainly something to be wary of.



## Using Karma

There are many ways to use Karma, the measure of your character's standing with their gods. Some happen between sessions, when he is in the Maelstrom talking with those gods. Other uses are more immediate and can help him out during play.

Below are some examples of 'calling on the gods'. These are always available to your character. Be aware, though, that if your character comes up with an innovative request outside of these examples then the gods may still be able to help and your director should decide a) whether the gods hear the request from across the Barrier and b) what the Karma cost of disturbing them will be.

- There are times when all goes wrong and all that is left to do is leave the outcome to the gods. In situations of dire need, you can choose an amount of Karma to burn (based on how much trouble your character is in) and then shout your prayer to the gods and hope. If you're sitting down, then stand tall and make your prayer good and loud.
- A Reincarnate who goes into Coma loses Karma (see 'Coma' above).
- During an Action, your character may use Karma to replenish the Pulse of his Telesma. Each point of Karma refreshes up to 10 Pulse up to the maximum of the Telesma.

### Karma and enlightenment

All being well, your character will pick up a goodly amount of Karma over time, which he can use to call in some favours from his gods. Most common of these is the right to ask a god to teach him new things or supernaturally enhance him. Such enlightenment takes the god away from their day-to-day carefree living, of course, so a Karma loss is to be expected.

When in the Maelstrom, the cost to enhance an attribute or ability, or to learn a new Arcana or Conjuring is the same as during character creation (see 'Characters at the Start' above)

Any of your character's attributes, as well as the elemental attributes and maximum Pulse attribute of his Telesma, may be improved up to a maximum score of 13 only. Furthermore, it is very unlikely that your character can get his Telesma's non-Dominion elemental attributes above 0. Each set of gods has the knowledge of manipulating four elements only, and the other four tend to remain a mystery to their followers except in very special circumstances.

### Reincarnate Status

Each Dominion has various levels of status in the eyes of the gods. Whilst Incarnates strive to become gods from the moment they come into existence, Reincarnates must rise up to become Incarnates themselves before they can start on their path to godhood.

The more work for the gods your character undertakes the more Karma he will



gain, and the higher his personal standing with the gods will be. The ultimate goal in Karma terms for a Reincarnate is 500, at which point his gods will offer him the chance of Transformation to become an Incarnate, if he so wishes of course. Life as an Incarnate is further described in other supplements, but Transformation is the first stage for a mortal to become a god himself....

This means that during play it becomes an issue whether to spend Karma for divine aid, for attribute and ability advancement, or whether to save it to rise up ranks to become an Incarnate and then on to becoming a god. In this issue, each individual needs to make different decisions based upon their personal agendas.

There are ten levels of Reincarnate, and the higher up these levels your character rises not only brings him closer to his gods but also aids him during play. Each character starts off at rank one with little or no Karma. He also starts with one fate card dealt by the director, which he can use during the session to replace a randomly drawn card, thereby helping himself and his party at a vital time. The rank you have achieved determines the number of cards that you have dealt to you at the start of a session, as follows:

Rank	Amount of Karma Needed	Fate Cards
1	0	1
2	50	2
3	100	2
4	150	3
5	200	3
6	250	4
7	300	4
8	350	5
9	400	5
10	450	6

Once 500 Karma is reached, your character may either remain at rank ten or be Transformed into an Incarnate. As each character progresses, he will gain more respect from Incarnates and Reincarnates of a lesser rank. Being brought to the attention of gods and Incarnates is not always a good thing, however. Being more visible often means being relied upon more by the gods to do some of their more difficult and challenging undertakings.

It is worth remembering that, in the universe of Suzerain, Karma comes and Karma goes. Because of Karma spending it is possible for your character to fluctuate between ranks during the course of a campaign, scenario or even session. This represents the difficulty of keeping the gods impressed if you continually call on them for help.



### A brief aside

Time goes by. It moves at a constant rate in the Maelstrom, no matter how many Mortal Realms time periods your character has been to. Time also passes in the real world between sessions. Either way, the good news is that you can play for years without your character ageing - it simply isn't a concern for Reincarnate spirits. Once the gods hire someone and take them from their mortal body, only the soul is left - and for a Reincarnate the soul is immortal.

Generally, your character will be in the Mortal Realms during play sessions. The director may run a prologue or epilogue in the Maelstrom where the party and the gods chat about their progress, and maybe not. Either way, it is assumed that your character is in the Maelstrom between sessions, and going about their regular Dominion business, living among the Incarnates of their Dominions.

This time is represented on the Internet, as Suzerain: Eternal Empires - a persistent server where you may log-in and your character can spend his time improving his abilities and attributes, or getting involved with Dominion politics, or joining groups of like-minded spirits in other adventures to the Maelstrom wastelands, or getting up to any number of other things.

This isn't an essential part of Suzerain: Mortal Realms, but you may want to come and give it a go at [www.suzerain.net](http://www.suzerain.net)

## Example of play

When we left them, Tim and Kate were in a musty Egyptian-period corridor just outside a chamber with ornate doors, freshly engulfed by darkness from one of Tim's Arcana, while Steve and Jenny entered the chamber to see what was inside.

Later, escaping guards and finding their way into a secret labyrinth, the party takes a break. The four players and their director take a chance to stretch and eat pizza, as provided by the guests to Jenny's house - a thank you to her as the host for the session. The characters, meanwhile, are in the Maelstrom giving Talia an update on what they've found out so far.

After the break, the scene restarts with the characters being sent back to the Mortal Realms by their Incarnate keeper, Talia.

**Director:** "Okay folks. Let's get started, if everybody's got their character ready."

**Kate:** "Yes"



## Time in Suzerain

It is the various time frames which make Suzerain: Mortal Realms a fascinating game, together with the interaction between immortal spirits of the Maelstrom and mortals. How the chosen time period is played will affect how the characters and extras react to the sources of conflict you put in their path. We'll look at conflict in more detail later, but let's consider time in a bit more detail for a moment as a basis for story lines.

One of the integral concepts in Suzerain: Mortal Realms is the flexibility and mutability of time. The gods of all the major Dominions seem all-powerful in the manipulations they use to get Reincarnates into suitable host bodies across time periods. However, there is an authority greater than even the gods, restricting their influence in several ways – the Universe itself.

## Time and the Maelstrom

The Maelstrom's relationship with time in the Mortal Realms is not entirely understood, even by the gods. Time passes in the Maelstrom, but on a different and separate plane to the chronological time in the Mortal Realms. Some temporal theorists suggest that the Mortal Realms are like a river, and the Maelstrom is like the banks of the river. Time proceeds upon the banks normally, but if anyone wishes to jump into the river, they can do so at any point of the river, from the source (the beginning of time in the Mortal Realms) to the mouth of the river (the End Times). This seems to correspond best with the principles of time travel. The two planes coexist and are dependent upon each other (there could be no river without banks after all) but still exist in completely different capacities.

However, unlike jumping into a river, travelling between the two realms is a little more difficult. The Barrier prevents much travel between them, and it requires a great expenditure of power to cross it, power that can come only from a god. The journey is not exactly comfortable for the subject, either.

To make matters worse, the Barrier is also quite opaque and prevents most visibility between the Maelstrom and the Mortal Realms. It also prevents the gods from exerting the full force of their powers in the Mortal Realms - they have much



less influence outside the Maelstrom. The Reincarnates, once they land in the Mortal Realms, are usually quite alone apart from emergency communication. This upsets the gods no end.

### **The truth?**

Or, at least, this is what time might be. This concept of time and the timeline is a best guess, a theory by the most advanced, super-intelligent minds in the Maelstrom. They still might be wrong. The Universe and the Realms are vast, unknowable entities; even the gods do not understand their nuances and truths. What the truth might actually be could be more shattering than anything anyone expects.

## **The Past**

*We are at the end of things.*

*All is in the past.*

*All that will happen has happened.*

*This is the truth.*

The End Times are exactly that; the end of time. The world has played out its dance on its merry stage, and this is the final bow before the curtain falls. All events have happened in their course, and are set in stone. The timeline is whole, and complete. It is a perfectly solid, smooth object. At least, that would be the case if the Universe hadn't created the gods and Incarnates at the last minute and they hadn't got involved.

The gods started sending their emissaries back and forth, causing ripples through the river a spider-web of cracks through the stone. Changing things, altering outcomes, and creating new situations: these things could irrevocably change the course of the timeline and possibly have catastrophic consequences. In order to prevent this, it seems as though there are several natural safety mechanisms inherent in the timeline, which prevent a series of paradoxes collapsing the Mortal Realms... and not even the gods know what would happen to the Maelstrom if that were to occur.

### **Inhabiting mortal bodies**

Prime among these is the restriction on Reincarnates' ability to move through time. Since Reincarnates can only enter into the bodies of living mortals, then they can only appear in one place at any one time. This limits the disruptive effect upon



the timeline. There is no way that a Reincarnate can be in more than one place at the same time.

Thus, a Reincarnate could not return to a body at the same instant in history that he had already inhabited it, nor 'jump' into another body at the same time. The timeline naturally prevents this, and the Reincarnate is rudely jarred back to the Maelstrom for any such attempt. It is possible to re-enter a body after it has been previously vacated by the Reincarnate, so a Reincarnate could re-enter a body 5 minutes after it had been vacated at the end of a previous mission.

Unfortunately, this sort of rapid jumping in and out near a particular instant is unhealthy for the timeline... after the incursion of Reincarnates, the Universe needs time to repair itself. Additionally, the opaque nature of the Barrier makes it difficult for jumps to be quite so precise when planning them from the Maelstrom, and the risk of jumping back to where the Reincarnate was already present generally makes the sponsors leave a little gap to be sure.

**Due to the Barrier, the gods' influence is greatly reduced in the Mortal Realms. In particular, they cannot always be sure that their sources are right in knowing where and when the object of the mission is, exactly. Because of this, Reincarnates often find themselves in undesirable places and situations when entering a new time period, and often not best placed time-wise. Occasionally they are even up to a few months before when their mission will become active which can present several problems, including integrating into the local society. Occasionally, they also arrive at the last minute. Nobody said it was easy, being at the whim of the gods....**

### **Re-establishing the natural order**

Since the timeline has already almost finished by the beginning of the End Times, altering events is not an easy task. In theory, only the End Times from the creation of the first gods in the Maelstrom is undecided and uncertain even to those gods. In practice, there are ways around the rigidity of the timeline.

In order to prevent catastrophic and fundamental changes in history, the timeline adapts events caused by the interference of gods and spirits to reassert 'standard', unaltered history. The very presence of Reincarnates changes events, since they are usually doing things their host lives never would have attempted, so the Universe constantly has to re-knit events around the changes introduced by the Reincarnates.

Most significant changes to the timeline are patched over without much difficulty. The Universe makes sure of this. This means that it is the minor changes where the gods' interest lies. The Universe is constantly re-knitting time around Reincarnates,



as well as trying to hold itself together during the End Times. It simply does not have (to put it in human terms) the time or the energy to attend to every little detail.

Almost all changes introduced by the spirits are minor (meaning that they would not fundamentally change the beginning of the End Times): a policeman dying in a shootout, an unusual commotion in a street, or someone witnessing Arcana being used. These are patched around by the timeline, especially if the Reincarnates 'jump out' afterwards. However, there are usually so many minor changes introduced that the Universe has to alter things slightly from the original, leaving some changes in the timeline despite its best efforts.

It is in the nature of people to explain away things they can't comprehend, and this slightly elastic aspect of history is part of that phenomenon. The gods generally do not complain about this; it suits their purposes (both altruistic and otherwise) to make small changes and force the timeline to adapt to these alterations. Therefore, the course of history subtly and slowly changes.

### **When problems happen**

Of course, in an ideal world the timeline would be able to paper over all the cracks and re-knit itself into a perfectly coherent whole again, but both the Maelstrom and the Mortal Realms are far from ideal. A major fear all the gods secretly share is that there will be a major change in the timeline, an earth-shattering event that will either be created, altered or stopped altogether, and for one reason or another the Universe cannot change or cope with it. This could be feasibly be caused by several catalysts: a Void or other supernatural being, a group of Reincarnates being careless, problems as the Universe grows weaker, or something as of yet unknown.

The repercussions of such a change, theorise the gods, would be catastrophic. It would fundamentally alter the course of history, thereby jeopardising the very fabric of the Maelstrom as well as the Mortal Realms.

These types of circumstances could cause massive discrepancies between what was set in stone and what comes to be, and eventually rifts or possibly vortexes in the mortal timeline would appear. These rifts would threaten the Maelstrom, as they absorb time itself. With no river, there is nothing to nourish the banks.

Situations where the timeline is so badly disrupted will almost never occur, and therefore neither do major problems in the timeline. The Universe fixes practically all major shifts, and most of the situations characters will find themselves in will be healed by the timeline (i.e. you, the director). The Universe is flexible enough to cope with most reasonable situations. For example, if the assassin's bullet missed JFK due to a scuffle with the gunman, then the Universe would activate another attempt on his life a few days later that would succeed.

However, the characters shouldn't be heedless of the



consequences of their actions; everything they do will have a multitude of smaller repercussions, whether they're aware of it or not, and the Universe is unlikely to catch all of those. This is perfect for you as the director, giving you the opportunity to explore the backdrop of major events in some detail, concentrating on Lee Harvey Oswald's revolutionary comrades perhaps rather than the assassination of the President itself, which couldn't be prevented in any case.

## Abilities in different time periods

Players generally play characters from the contemporary time period, but there will be some who want to play characters who start from other time periods, and somewhere along the line you as the director will need to prepare extras from the past or future for your game. As a result, we have included here rules for resolving abilities from other time periods. In *Suzerain: Mortal Realms* there are three different types of abilities that you need to be aware of: limited, associated and unlimited.

### Limited abilities

Limited abilities are those that depend on the rough time period the character is from, whether the period is modern, pre-modern or futuristic. Limited abilities are those like science, empathy and computing which cannot be possessed by characters from all time periods. You need to decide whether the character can have the ability, then apply the maximum levels from the table below. Supernatural beings such as Incarnates and gods may go to +5 in all time periods, since they live outside of mortal time.

This table represents the fact that futuristic man will generally know more than we do and that we generally know more than pre-modern man about common subjects.

#### Pre-Modern (eg astronomy)

+1 Keen Amateur – The individual knows something of the stars, sun, moon and seasons from observation and folklore. Medieval shepherds with a keen interest may fall into this category.

+2 Professional – The individual may be a ship's captain, skilled at navigating by the stars, or a senior Egyptian priest.

+3 Genius – The individual would be a scientist researcher into the heavens, someone of the stature of Galileo, understanding the relationship of stars and planets, knowing that the Earth is merely a planet in orbit of the sun and perhaps that the moon is a satellite of the Earth.

#### Modern (eg computing)

+1 Inexperienced Amateur – The individual knows how to install software



and use it fairly efficiently. They follow latest technology with interest and read reviews on a regular basis.

+2 Keen Amateur – The individual can build a computer from parts, and does some rudimentary software coding in his spare time.

+3 Professional – The individual administrates the operational environment of a complex network and large databases to control. They go on regular formal training courses on latest technology and implement it in their office.

+4 Genius – The individual is the chief coder of utilities and applications that keen amateurs revere as the ground-breaking and truly innovative. These applications wouldn't have existed without this key individual's vision and ability, and he is treated as a guru when in knowledgeable company.

#### **Futuristic (eg psychology)**

+1 Inexperienced Amateur – The individual knows who Freud was and that he was just a sad crack-pot. He implicitly knows that men and women are different, and that you can't teach children in the same way as adults.

+2 Keen Amateur – The individual reads up on the subject a bit, and takes an interest beyond analysing talk-show participants' motives. There is some conscious awareness that factors such as body language, clothing and voice tone affect everyday meetings, and some use of these factors.

+3 Trained Amateur – The individual has been on counselling courses and spends free time running a voluntary self-help group. Regulations require that this person know as much as a modern-day professional.

+4 Professional – The individual is fully trained in latest psychology techniques and may practice in a specialised field such as psychiatry or military psychology. He scoffs at how misguided the supposed 'professionals' of the 20th century were, while admiring their pioneer spirit in the face of such little understanding.

+5 Genius – This individual is at the forefront of research that becomes the latest techniques that the professionals will use in a few years. There may be a Nobel prize in it some time soon.

#### **Associated abilities**

Associated abilities are those that are associated with a generation of tool. For example rifles change over time and somebody who knows how to use one will have some idea of how to use one from a different period, but with minuses. The following table represents a sample of how you can apply associated skills with the different generations of tool or item:



**Skill**

Drive

Ride

Firearms (1-handed)

Firearms (2-handed)

Artillery

**1st Gen**

Wagon

Horse

Flintlock

Musket

Cannon

**2nd Gen**

Car

Bike

Handgun

Rifle

Howitzer

**3rd Gen**

Hovercar?

Hoverbike?

Energy Pistols?

Energy Rifles?

Energy Cannon?

You might give a character who is used to a particular generation of tool -1 to their ability modifier per generation they are away. This is in addition to bearing in mind that some technologies are too removed to even start figuring out. Psionic weapons fired by power from brain waves might be so different to rifles that you state the character cannot even fire one until they get some training, no matter how good their firearms modifier. Given basic training, however, the character might be able to get some of that firearms modifier cross-over.

Thus, if Jenny has drive of +2 (she's a modern day keen amateur) and is used to a regular modern car, she'd get only +1 if she was driving a wagon or a futuristic hovercar. If the director sets a scenario in the far, far future, with something beyond a hovercar, she might decide that Jenny gets +0 with that vehicle, but can still drive it. Her companions, with the drive ability at +1 or less, wouldn't even have a clue how to keep the vehicle on the road at the amazing speeds it travels.

**Unlimited abilities**

Certain abilities are unlimited, unlimited skills are those that do not change or change very little over time and therefore can be used the same in any period. Unlimited skills are those like athletics, leadership, negotiation, stealth and brawl.

**Scenario Storylines**

*Conflict (n):*

1. A struggle between opposing forces, a battle
2. Opposition between ideas or interests



both sides, sometimes it's a one-to-one. Occasionally, the characters will need to gang up on one opponent, be it a fearsome monster or giant cyborg. Change the odds and the sides regularly. Let the characters discover that they were the bad guys in the eyes of the local villagers so that they experience the opposite side of the fence ("but... but, that was our pet dragon."). Most of all, enjoy the possibilities.

## Populating your stories

*The enemy of my enemy is my friend.*

*French proverb*

So, who are these beings that will be involved in conflict of one kind or another, whether on the characters' side or against them?

Although the above quote is not always true, it does have some bearing on the Suzerain universe. Any party who is intent on causing damage to the Dominion of Valhallans may find that the offspring of Fenris, the wolf, will aid them. On the other hand, a party showing fealty towards the Valhallans may find the exact same beasts as their enemies. The lines between friend and foe is as many and varied as the people who make them. A friend one minute can turn to an enemy the next due to some political conflict elsewhere.

Conflict in Suzerain: Mortal Realms can be between literally anybody and anything. With friend and foe being one and the same, no more should you think that beast as purely evil, and the characters will soon learn that there are many shades of grey, too. For run-of-the-mill extras you shouldn't worry too much about these shades of grey - black and white is probably fine, but for key mortals and spirits you'll want to add more depth, and let the characters explore that depth for themselves.

Friend and foe alike can be found in all areas, from Maelstrom dwellers to mortals, and Mortal Realms oddities that don't quite fit anywhere in the scheme of things. We've taken the liberty of listing a few of them below for you to use as examples when creating your own, and the examples we've put in are designed for you to drop in to any scenario you might create for your group.

## Spirits of the Dominions

The spirits of each Dominion include all the Incarnates that have been created through mortal belief in the Dominions. These range from the highest gods to the lowest spirits fresh from creation. Each has the ability to grow in strength until they can cross the Barrier, although for them to walk in the Mortal Realms is very rare and



would take a monumental amount of energy. Incarnates generally only appear for a short period of time, get the task done that they were concentrating on, and then leave. Their native home is the Maelstrom, and that's where they tend to stay.

Using spirits of the Dominions as adversaries in the Mortal Realms should be done with great care, as trying to send one back to the Maelstrom could prove to be a major task for any group of Reincarnates. They will tend to manipulate mortals and other Reincarnate groups to help them, and remain behind the scenes until they have no choice but to reveal themselves.

More commonly, Incarnates and gods act as sponsors and benefactors of a party of characters, helping as possible from the safety of the Maelstrom. The characters should be glad that they have such powerful back-up, although all such extras will have their own agendas that they might try to bend their Reincarnates to, sucking a party in to greater politics than they could comfortably handle.

Spirits of the Dominions are one of the most powerful forms of creature that the Reincarnates will interact with. Incarnates will have access to a significant number of Arcana and Conjurations available to their Dominion, although they may not be able to use all of them with great skill. They will also have a greater supply of Pulse with which to use the Arcana than the characters. Most importantly, they tend to have powerful friends in the gods. As for the gods themselves, each one can be assumed to have access to any Arcana or Conjuring available to their Dominion from the list in this book, and an inexhaustible supply of Pulse.

### Talia, an Olympian Incarnate

Talia is an Incarnate who works for Hermes and acts as his intermediary with Reincarnates. She's a roguish individual, but not untrustworthy to those she likes. She's a mid-ranking Incarnate, with enough experience to have the attention of a god, but not enough to be looking for Ascension herself yet.

**Pulse (Max/Current):** 10/

**Health (Max/Current):** 70/

#### Physical Attributes:

Strength: 5

Agility: 7

#### Mental Attributes:

Intelligence: 8

Wits: 9

#### Social Attribute:

Charisma: 7

#### Elemental Attributes:

Light: 4

Stasis: 6

#### Abilities:

Negotiation +3, Psychology +2, Philosophy +1,

Investigation +2, Stealth +2, Acting +3, Alertness +2.

Constitution: 7

Co-ordination: 8

Perception: 7

Willpower: 8

Essence: 5

Dark: 5



**Powers:**

Seeker, Examine Soul, Detect Lie, Darkness, Mind Blast, Entangle, Ring of Silence, Many Faces of the Rogue (an Olympian Arcana that allows the user to shift their features into the visage of another face for a period of time given ten minutes of total calm to compose themselves, Cost 2, Stasis action).

## Feral spirits

Some of the more fickle antagonists the characters may face are the feral spirits. Running the whole gamut of antagonists, 'ferals' are looked down upon by Incarnates and gods from established Dominions. There are all sorts of spirits wandering the Maelstrom individually or in groups formed by religions and cults too small to spawn true gods who can make a Dominion for them to live in.

Such feral Incarnates still have the full mix of powers found in their more established cousins, albeit the Arcana and Conjurations are unique to their group, and range from minor Incarnates to master Incarnates in the same way as any spirit from the Dominions does. Individually or in groups, these spirits occasionally cross the Barrier and materialise in the Mortal Realms. There they often appear as 'angels' or 'demons' from their own twisted faith, causing mayhem wherever they go. Primarily, they are involved with religious insurrection in an unending struggle to gain the necessary followers to exalt their leaders to Ascension and to create their own Dominions. This behaviour in turn upsets the Dominion spirits who think of the ferals as most uncivilised as a result.

Often Feral Incarnates long to be part of an established Dominion, and because they are not allowed in they develop a dislike for members of that Dominion. These spirits become nemeses for those Dominions, with Grendel and Fenris being good examples for the Valhallans. These creatures are those mythical creatures that torment members of a particular Dominion and can often be at the root of many problems.

The feral spirits are by no means united. They fight amongst themselves just as much as they do with representatives of the Dominions. Their frequent aim is to hurt other religions or cults and to improve their own. To face the gods head-on, to attack the entrenched religions, would be far too dangerous. Instead, they tend to attack Reincarnates they have targeted, or try to convert them, which would be a great coup indeed.

Ferals' forms are varied, taking the guise of many foci of fringe religions and cults, and their motives are as varied as their forms. Some have gone mad from the solitude of being in the Maelstrom wastes without other like-minded Incarnates or gods around, others are bitter about their derisory treatment by the established Dominions. Many more are just keen to remain nomads of the Maelstrom, and as



long as they are left alone they will not bother other people. These are unlikely to feature in Mortal Realms tales, since they have little reason to go across the Barrier, if they are even aware of it.

Feral spirits are akin to spirits of the Dominions, although they range even more vastly in power. Each feral spirit has a unique look and Arcana / Conjurings of their own. However, unlike spirits of the Dominions, more powerful feral Incarnates have been known to come through the Barrier, spurning the Maelstrom altogether for a better life on the other side (as they see it). When such spirits do come through, you can expect catastrophic results to follow them – witness the carnage that Grendel manifests on the Vikings in revenge for being spurned by the Valhallan gods.

### **Circa, a feral Incarnate**

Circa is the villain of the six scenarios in this book. An Incarnate created from a cult that never grew to support a second Incarnate, Circa was left to fend for himself in the Maelstrom, where slowly he went mad. Eventually, he grew powerful enough to cross the Barrier he had seen on his travels, and liked the Mortal Realms more. Not restrained by any of the same rules as the spirits of the Dominions, he goes on a rampage through time periods, directly feasting on mortal souls as he travels. Circa's full write up and statistics can be found below in the Circa Cycle Scenarios Overview chapter.

## **Glitches**

The Universe is a big and complex place, and occasionally things go wrong with souls and they do not transfer into Pulse when the body dies. Souls that didn't go through the normal process for one reason or another are known as glitches. These have found their way into the human psyche as creatures like ghosts and vampires, to name just a couple.

These beings are not always tied with any particular religion. Their tormented souls have never found their way once the body is dead, and they remain in the Mortal Realms. These beings are rare and tend not to meddle directly in the affairs of the gods, although they may stir up such a fear in the local populace that they start changing the beliefs of people. When this affects the gods' plans, they may act and the Reincarnates can find themselves confronted by a glitch.

Of course the Reincarnates are themselves glitches, in that they have not transferred to Pulse when their mortal bodies died. Reincarnates should be considered as special cases of glitches in that they are tied to one of the Dominions, and



are glitches only by default of the gods' intervention.

Glitches can have a wide variety of powers and a large portion of them will be able to feast off of the mortal creatures in one way or another. For example, vampires need to drink blood while ghosts tend to feed off of the fear of mortals. Many glitch powers are defined through their ability to manipulate their own Pulse, which is refreshed when the glitch feasts. Reincarnates do not follow the normal route of glitches and their powers are defined by the Dominion that they follow, with their Pulse being replenished by the good will of the gods rather than any predatory or parasitic attack on mortals.

Such beings generally have strengths and weaknesses that link to their previous life. When faced with a glitch, the Reincarnates may well need to research the past to decide how to beat it, since these beings can often be difficult to master without such knowledge.

Most glitches tend to shun mortals, as it reminds them of how they once were and how they should have been. However, they will venture in to populated areas when they need to feed, as necessary. A castle or farm set away from any other civilisation is a common home location for a glitch, and they will generally defend their privacy.

This isn't to say that glitches cannot hide in an occupied area. Cities for example are big, and often it is easy to hide within them as long as they find a relatively quiet area. Ghosts, indeed, rarely need to reveal themselves unless they are feasting or have a specific weakness (that they are drawn to appear in the same subway station each month at the same time, for example).

Glitches are fantastic opportunities for some very special adventures and, although they should appear sparingly, they have some characteristics that make them perfect for the occasional sub-plot in a campaign. Most importantly, glitches are not mortal, so may be met in several time periods if they are not destroyed outright. This means that a particular vampire may recognise a reincarnate group's behaviour centuries after they first met... only now the vampire is much more powerful.

Such beings should not be treated as adversaries every time, either. There are good opportunities for a character to form a bond with such a tragic being, and this is a chance for you as director to use this relationship to your advantage and give up useful information to the group. It wouldn't be the first time a ghost's appearance was used as a portent of things to come, for instance, and Voodooon Reincarnates in particular should find this aspect of the Mortal Realms most fascinating.

### **Aran, a vampire**

Aran was a bouncer in a Mars night-club (could be any time period, but we thought we'd pop him into a futuristic setting rather than the stock Victorian gothic backdrop). He earned enough money to get by without flashy living or extravagant needs. It was a decent life – the odd fight to spice things up and a decent bunch of friends.

Then the thin guy started coming to the club. He's long gone, on some star



freighter or other no doubt, but he left Aran with a hunger that consumes him and would have killed him were he not so strong. Now he lives even further down, in the pits of the Dome, away from the light and his former friends, and nobody knows his secret apart from his victims.

Aran is still new to the life of a vampire and, not being a big reader, he doesn't know much about his condition. He's confused, but sure that what's going on isn't normal. He half thinks that he's actually the victim of some strange drug, and half accepts the truth. He has yet to figure out what happens next.

**Pulse (Max/Current):** 8/8

**Health (Max/Current):** 90/90

**Physical Attributes:**

Strength: 8  
Agility: 5

Constitution: 9  
Co-ordination: 6

**Mental Attributes:**

Intelligence: 3  
Wits: 5

Perception: 6  
Willpower: 4

**Social Attribute:**

Charisma: 4

**Elemental Attributes:**

Change: 4

**Abilities:**

Brawl +3, Stealth +2, Melee (1-handed) +2, Intimidation +1, Drive +2

**Weaknesses:**

**Sunlight & fire** – Vampires cannot go out during the day. They react badly to sunlight and take 10 damage for every round they spend in direct sunlight, which cannot be regenerated and must heal as if they were mortal. Vampires are also frightened by fire as it kills them. A vampire cannot regenerate such damage and, much like sunlight, must heal at the same rate as a mortal would from fire wounds.

**Crosses** – Vampires are actually repelled by any proper religious relic, not just any common cross, when it channels the real belief of its wearer. This reflects the fact that they have been abandoned by the gods because they are a glitch. Vampires need to make a hard (difficulty 14) Willpower test every round that they want to interact with somebody brandishing a proper religious relic who truly believes in its power, or retreat.

Religious relics are hard to come by, but anything that has been blessed by any god from any Dominion will do. Mortals



often have these relics, which is why stories of priests with crosses repelling vampires are true. One god must have blessed their item in the past or at the moment that they brandish it at the vampire, which they sometimes do for true believers who pray for help at such a time.

**Decrepitude** – Vampires use one Pulse every evening when they wake to stop their body from deteriorating with life in it. If they cannot pay that Pulse, they start to rot as if a freshly deceased corpse, losing one constitution (and ten from maximum health) per day until they are totally destroyed or find sustenance.

**Powers:**

**Feasting** – A vampire needs to drink human blood to survive. Feasting is the way in which the vampire replenishes Pulse, which it uses to prevent decrepitude and fuel its powers. Feasting gains the vampire one Pulse per pint of fresh blood drunk (taking only about ten seconds, or three rounds in combat). A human who loses approximately four pints tends to go into shock and dies thereafter.

**Regenerate** – Vampires regenerate normal damage that is done to them. This ability makes vampires much harder to kill, although they cannot regenerate damage done by sunlight and fire. Regeneration happens as and when the vampire wishes, costing 1 Pulse to restore 10 health, up to maximum health.

**Create Progeny** – Vampires can create other vampires, although they tend to do so sporadically, when the whim takes them rather than on any regular basis. To do this, a vampire needs to kill a human by feasting and then in the last few moments of life feed that human blood from himself. Three nights later the new vampire will rise from the dead, with only muddled memories of the previous few days at best.

**Sense being** – Vampires can detect mortals all of the time. They can feel their Pulse and can use this to track them and find them when they hide. Over time a vampire can sense supernatural beings by their Pulse. How long it takes for a vampire to know that Reincarnates are after him depends on the pace of game you want to run.

**Shape-shift** – Aran additionally has the power to change his form into that of any animal. He often does this allowing him to prowl the streets and remain unseen. He also does this as a means of escape when they are in danger. Shape-shifting is a Change action that allows the vampire to become any common animal shape he wishes. Shape-shift costs 4 Pulse and takes a few seconds (one round) to complete. If Aran is involved in combat or actions that require concentration, then the difficulty is raised to very hard (target 16).

Aran's shape-shifting is an example of the sort of powers that vampires may have. However, each vampire is an individual, and will have different powers, generally learning more as they wander the universe over a period of centuries... for those that make it that far. In Aran's case he probably inherited this power from the blood of the vampire that sired him.



## Naturals

Some creatures are a natural part of the Universe, typically the day to day hazards faced by our forefathers. These include everything from rabid wolves to elephants, snakes to sharks. Generally these simple beasts are merely in the way of the Reincarnates and will act in a natural way – running away, hiding, or stalking the characters, perhaps.

Every now and again, however, such animals can be used by supernatural beings to further their own desires. The servants of the Dominions, and in particular the Druidic Circle, have been known to possess the power to speak to animals and to obtain their aid. Specific deities are known for their association with certain animals, such as Athena and owls.

Although conflict with animals is rare, particularly in the modern world, animals are useful in other ways, and certain creatures can become extras in their own right, particularly 'intelligent' animal such as cats and dolphins.

The most common of the normal creatures that characters will interact with are humans. These, of all naturals, pose the greatest threat, and simultaneously represent the greatest potential that any party could face. In fact, the Reincarnates will probably have to deal with more humans than anything else. The human population is also the most diverse of all the types of creatures that the Reincarnates will face, and this is useful in keeping all encounters interesting.

The abilities that a human has will be as diverse as those of the Reincarnates, and will also depend upon the time period in which the scenario is set. Bear in mind that the average human attribute is 5, and never goes above 10, no matter how exceptional the individual. Some examples of 'stock humans' are given below for reference:

### Musketeer

This is the profile for the average soldier from the Three Musketeers, who comes armed with musket and sword (see the equipment list in section one for more details). These are relatively-speaking elite troops, the French king's own bodyguard.

**Health (Max/Current):** 60/

#### Physical Attributes:

Strength: 6  
Agility: 6

Constitution: 6  
Co-ordination: 7

#### Mental Attributes:

Intelligence: 5  
Wits: 6

Perception: 6  
Willpower: 5



**Social Attribute:**

Charisma: 5

**Abilities:**

Firearms (2-handed) +3, Melee (1-handed weapon) +2, Brawl +1

**Cyber-SWAT team agent**

This is the profile for the average Cyber-SWAT team agent in the 'Dr Ballard I presume!' scenario later in this section of the book.

**Health (Max/Current):** 60/**Physical Attributes:**

Strength: 6

Constitution: 6

Agility: 6 (8)\*

Co-ordination: 7

**Mental Attributes:**

Intelligence: 5

Perception: 7

Wits: 6

Willpower: 4

**Social Attribute:**

Charisma: 4

**Abilities:**

Firearms (2-handed) +3, Melee (1-handed) +2, Brawl +2, Military Tactics +1, Athletics +2, Survival +2

**Equipment:**

Sub-machine gun, two grenades (blast), knife, and cyberware. This consists of skin armour on the chest and back, grafted rather than worn, stopping the first five points of any damage not targeted at limbs or the head. Further, each member of the squad has an implanted communication device in their throat and ear to keep contact between them and with their control centre. Their eyes can be enhanced to include night vision, and are voice activated (by saying 'enhance vision' or the equivalent).

\* When going into a mission, each team member takes a chemical cocktail that temporarily (for a period of two hours) increases speed of movement and balance, giving them +2 to agility.

**Mafia muscle**

This is the profile for the average Mafia hard-guy or bodyguard for use anywhere in the twentieth century.

**Health (Max/Current):** 50/**Physical Attributes:**

Strength: 6

Constitution: 5

Agility: 4

Co-ordination: 5



**Mental Attributes:**

Intelligence: 3  
Wits: 5

Perception: 5  
Willpower: 4

**Social Attribute:**

Charisma: 2

**Abilities:**

Firearms (1-handed) +1 or Melee (1-handed) +1, Brawl +2, Intimidation +1

**Equipment:**

Revolver or knife, badly-fitting suit

## Unnaturals

Once, the Universe was only populated by naturals – normal people, creatures, and plants. At the moment it created the first spirits in the Maelstrom, however, the Universe also spawned the first unnaturals in the image of legends and mythological figures. Not all unnaturals wield supernatural powers but a fair few of the more powerful ones do.

What marks these beings as different is that they are based on mortal creatures, and thus age and die like naturals. Further, they largely spend their time in the Mortal Realms, and a great many of them don't exist in the Maelstrom at all.

Hydras, dragons, centaurs and satyr all defy natural laws, yet they exist. Often they can be manipulated or cajoled by the gods and used for their own purpose. Sometimes they are feared. Occasionally they are worshipped. How many werewolves there are, or redcaps, or cyclops' is anyone's guess. There seem to be as many as people claim to have seen. For the moment the Universe has only created them to fit the places where mortals expect them. However, there is nothing to say the Universe won't start populating the rest of existence with such creatures, more frequently, and less secretively.

Unnaturals are an opportunity for you, as director, to spice up a Greek island with a real-life pegasus, for instance. At a further stretch, you might have a family of pegasi roosting on the rooftop of a Manhattan skyscraper. It's really up to you. And don't forget, such creatures are special, may have special powers, and may not be dumb animals... the Sphinx, for instance, was notoriously intelligent. Finally, don't forget that these creatures may be mortal, but just like other beast, some of them may live a very long time, so it shouldn't come as a surprise for the characters to meet the same dragon that escaped them in another time period a few hundred years later.



## Centaur

Centaurs have the lower half of a horse and the upper torso of a human male. They are often associated with Olympus because many were sighted as part of heroic Greco-Roman myth, and ancient Greece is where you'll find small herds roaming now, although some live in the wilderness near Olympus itself in the Maelstrom.

They are quiet, retiring beings that keep themselves to themselves and don't like to be disturbed by men, at which point any characters meeting one might find that they are very skilled hunters in their own right.

**Health (Max/Current):** 80/

### Physical Attributes:

Strength: 7  
Agility: 5

Constitution: 8  
Co-ordination: 6

### Mental Attributes:

Intelligence: 5  
Wits: 5

Perception: 5  
Willpower: 5

### Social Attribute:

Charisma: 5

### Abilities:

Melee (1-handed) +2, Archery +2, Tracking +3,

## Voids

Voids are, next to the spirits of the Dominions, the most dangerous opponents that the Reincarnates will encounter. They can also be found in the Mortal Realms a lot more frequently than any spirit of the Dominion, and they can exert more control and influence over mortals than even the higher spirits.

Where the Voids come from and what they are remains a mystery even to the gods. One theory suggests that they were created out of the subconscious angst of the Universe when the gods started forming and are their perfect shadows. What is known is that they want to see the destruction of the Universe as we know it. A Void will use any means possible, and can quite often be behind the scenes manipulating the actions of any other type of creature. It may also decide to take a hand personally, at which point the characters may need to face its awesome powers in person.

Voids tend to work alone, although it is not unknown for some of them to work together to achieve certain goals. However, they are as likely to turn on each other as the Reincarnates who oppose them. The powers of the Voids are every bit as impressive and varied as the Arcana and Conjurations that Incarnates of the Maelstrom use. Some Voids have also been known to wield powers that Incarnates would envy.



Like glitches, Voids are capable of feeding off of mortals but they do so by devouring the souls, as opposed to glitches who feed of the body or emotions.

Such creatures can often become as powerful as gods, and so there is good reason to fear them. Voids may be the power behind other spirits' actions against the gods. While they are often not met in person, the characters may discover that a Void is behind their current problems. As such, they are a good example of a nemesis working indirectly against a party.

Each Void needs to be carefully created and tailored to your own adventures. It is unlikely that you'll put such a strong and evil enemy in the path of a group to begin with, but there is no reason why the characters shouldn't find out that behind the scenes there is a Void at work. Hiding in different parts of the Mortal Realms or Maelstrom, dripping hatred for all gods, Incarnates and Reincarnates, they are the ultimate villain. Even a weak Void would have attributes as high as a near-perfect human, and the supernatural abilities to match a mid-ranking Incarnate or better. This is a fearsome and highly intelligent predator, best unleashed over the period of a long campaign.

## Scenario Styles

The style of your game will determine many of the key factors that make it work for your group of players. It will dictate the pace and intensity, and in comparison to these, the setting and plot are mere flesh on the bones, as the style sets out the very fundamentals of a scenario or campaign.

Below we've taken a few of the most popular styles and genres of modern times. There are others, of course, and as you scan the cinema listings and fiction shelves of your local bookshop you'll come up with many more ideas, we're sure.

## Action

The action genre emphasises proactive solutions to problems, often involving lots of guns, epic fistfights and massive property