

Simul

computer-aided tabletop role-playing

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Player's guide

One person acts as a Storyteller who creates adventures for the other players who create characters to form a party of adventurers. The players describe their character's intentions and the Storyteller narrates events and reactions.

Contested actions may require dice rolls. The Storyteller declares a characteristic, eg a contest of strength, dexterity or intelligence.

Action-dice can quickly deal with simple individual actions. Complex disputes lend themselves to Simul's Us-vs-Them system.

Summary

Tabletop role-playing where rolling high succeeds.

- Open ended
- Co-operative
- Player facing
- Narrative driven
- Simultaneous resolution of action

Players state their aims.

Reasonable actions normally progress.

Resolve harder tasks by rolling dice.

Typically the Storyteller declares a contested characteristic (or choice of characteristics).

In Us-vs-Them, the Storyteller states a target number and collaborating players roll dice simultaneously. If **no** player achieves the target number, then negative consequences ensue. If **any** player meets or beats the target number then the whole party enacts their will.

To use the Us-vs-Them system on a tabletop computer-aid (eg tablet browser):-

- count the people on your side (Us)
- count the opposition (Them)
- visit the Simul web page
- select your number of players
- the system automatically calculates
 - which dice to roll
 - and your target number

Basics

Build on contributions by saying “Yes, and...”

Characteristics record numerical levels for a character’s Strength, Dexterity & Intelligence. Suffering consequences during play can reduce these levels.

Reasonable plans normally progress automatically without dice rolls.

Players occasionally roll dice when attempting difficult or contentious actions.

Rolling high normally produces beneficial outcomes.

When characters attempt difficult actions the Storyteller (Game Master or GM) declares a characteristic, or a choice of characteristics, appropriate for an activity. The Storyteller also says which dice to roll and states a target number.

Rolling below the target number may create ‘success with consequences’ ie characters succeed but with negative or unforeseen results.

At their discretion the Storyteller may issue one or two or three re-roll tokens to each player at the beginning of a session (eg d4 tokens where rolling 3 or 4 gains three re-roll tokens). Spending *one* re-roll token allows *every* player to re-roll their action-dice.

Characteristics

Players generate a basic character with three numbers for Strength, Dexterity & Intelligence respectively.

10 represents human average. Hence a characteristic of twenty means twice the capability of the average person.

To create a character, distribute 45 points over Strength, Dexterity and Intelligence. Each individual characteristic initially starts the game no lower than 8 and no higher than 30

These starting numbers represents your normal *level* for this characteristic. However adventuring may alter these characteristic values. You may receive a temporary boost. Suffering adverse consequences can reduce your characteristic's *current* value.

Strength includes most physical attributes like health, hardiness and vigour.

Dexterity also covers quick wits, reactions and perception.

Intelligence refers to mental or intellectual attributes such as knowledge, cognition and resolve.

Specific settings or genres may also suggest additional characteristics such as sanity or reputation.

Motive

Write down what motivates your character to adventure.

Specials

With your Storyteller and fellow players, agree a special expertise or item. Actions involving this specialism may allow a free re-roll or some other benefit.

Training and equipment

Reasonably decide which activities require training and crucial equipment, eg surgery, picking locks and hacking computers all require practice and specialist equipment.

Levelling-up

Characters normally level-up at the start of a game session. If you attended last session (and you feel prepared to silence your mobile phone and hide it from view for the next fifty minutes) then add 1 to a characteristic level. Alternatively, with everyone's consent, gain a specialism based on experience.

Optionally, to help a newcomer catch up, the character with the lowest combined total (strength plus dexterity plus intelligence levels) may receive 2 increments.

Character sheet

Record your character's attributes on a character sheet eg name, motivation and specialisms. Optionally include words for appearance, background, training, equipment etc.

For Strength, Dexterity and Intelligence record your normal **Level**, and **Current** value, and corresponding action-dice, eg

Name: Agent Nom de Plume

Motive: audacity

Special: trail

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Action-dice</i>
Strength	16		d12
Dexterity	17		d12
Intelligence	17		d12

Use your “Current” column to record any drops (or short-term gains) in characteristics resulting from adventuring. Note that such changes to characteristic values might also effect your current action-dice.

The Storyteller might ask you to temporarily reduce a characteristics eg psychological stress might reduce intelligence, hypothermia might reduce dexterity or body blows might reduce strength.

Restorative measures could potentially revive these depleted characteristics, eg with rest and relaxation. Severe damage might permanently reduce characteristics, such as losing a limb.

Action-dice

Group activities normally resolve using the “Us-vs-Them” dice mechanic. Whereas action-dice can quickly resolve individual actions.

For action-dice the base target value is 4.

This target score may decrease or increase for very easy or difficult activities.

Action-dice vary according to current characteristic values for Strength, Dexterity & Intelligence.

Characteristic value	Action-dice
0 to 10	d4
11 to 20	d6
21 to 30	d8
41 to 40	d10
51 to 50	d12
51 plus	d20

If a characteristic's current value moves across a dice threshold during play, then adjust your relevant action-dice to reflect your current value.

If a task involves any characteristics greater than 60 then, rather than action-dice, use the Us-vs-Them system.

Us-vs-Them

Us-vs-Them fosters party cooperation by asking players to roll dice in the centre of the table at the same time. Thus providing a collaborative focus for the simultaneous resolution of actions.

Players resolve actions concurrently. Players state their intentions and roll dice simultaneously.

Only players roll dice but the Storyteller may choose to narrate results.

“Us” refers to the total of all players plus their friendly allies. “Them” refers to the players' adversaries.

One way to calculate Us and Them values involves summing each side's characteristic levels. For example add up all strength levels on either side of a brawl, or total each side's dexterity levels in a shoot out, or sum each faction's intelligence levels in a battle of wits.

However Us-vs-Them values can record *any* comparable measure, such as number of troops in opposing armies or ships in each fleet.

For example if your space fleet with 5 capital ships faces an enemy with 7 capital ships, then $Us=5$ and $Them=7$. Similarly if your 100 Bronze Age warriors face 180 enemies then $Us=100$ and $Them=180$. But if your soldiers fight with twice the skill of the opposing troops then you could manually apply a force-multiplier of two for your side and enter $Us=200$ and $Them=180$.

Us-vs-Them divides Us-values by Them-values to create a ratio. Hence common attributes cancel out. For example, if both sides wield shields then the effect of shields cancels out. Therefore Us-vs-Them scales indefinitely for antagonists and protagonists of ever increasing prowess.

Order of play

- Visit the Simul web page.
- To use Us-vs-Them first select the number of participating players.
- Players state their intentions.
- The Storyteller declares the characteristics or attributes relevant to this situation.
- Calculate an "Us" value by totalling contributions from all friendlies.
- Sum all opposition from adversaries as a "Them" value.
- Enter these numbers onto the Us-vs-Them screen to determine which dice to roll and target number.

- All participating players roll their dice simultaneously after saying, “Ready, steady, roll!”
- The whole party progresses if **any** player meets or beats the target number.
- If **no** player achieves the target number then the party suffers setbacks, gives ground, takes losses or progresses but with negative consequences.
- Setbacks and losses may change the odds, thus prompting further rolls.

Interpreting dice

Allocating different coloured dice to each player can help narrate individual contributions by comparing dice rolls within the group, eg lowest rolling player performs the best.

With Us-vs-Them the **whole** party progresses if **any** player meets or beats the target number.

Party success during conflict normally forces enemies to suffer losses or give ground.

If no player succeeds then characters suffer setbacks or give ground or take losses. Alternatively the party may still progress but with negative or unforeseen consequences.

Setbacks generally frustrate party intentions.

Mass combat

Consider employing these mass combat rules (as opposed to the personal combat rules below) when the number of friendlies goes beyond just the party, eg with henchmen or allies.

If the group suffers a setback in mass combat then players must typically give ground or suffer casualties. If everyone agrees then particularly vulnerable personnel may suffer this damage. A suitable victim might be:

- inexperienced
- lowest dexterity
- peripheral to the plot
- located nearest the enemy
- the bravest person who risked the most

Alternatively allocate losses randomly.

The Storyteller may dictate alternate negative consequences of losing a combat or allow players to pick from a list such as: retreat, submit, subdue, wound, capture, kill, rout, or give ground.

Personal combat

Try resolving conflict in a way consistent with your story. For example duellists scar cheeks or pierce organs, boxers knock-out and assassins slit throats.

The Storyteller may permit players to pick from a list such as: retreat, submit, subdue, collapse, startle, wound, capture, kill, disarm, stun, flee, or give ground.

An alternative generalised way to handle damage in personal combat involves reducing characteristic levels (for Strength, Dexterity or Intelligence) by using dice.

If characters lose a fight or their adversaries get the jump on them, then the Storyteller might ask players to roll dice to determine how far to reduce a suitable characteristics.

Possible graduations include the following,

Weaponry	Action-dice
Unarmed combat	d4
Knives	d6
Bows and clubs	d8
Swords and spears	d10
Handguns	d12
Firearms	d20

If a characteristic's current value moves across a dice threshold during play, then adjust your relevant action-dice to reflect your current value.

Armour can keep characteristics from slipping below zero.

Negative characteristics normally means death.

Untreated wounds could continue to deplete characteristics over time and may eventually kill a character. Typically a bleeding wound will reduce strength by 1 (or more) per hour.

If any characteristic falls to zero then a character becomes incapacitated and entirely vulnerable to capture or coup de grâce.

Wrong place wrong time

Superior weapons obsoleting defences may create a kill-zone with random chance of wounding or death, eg artillery barrage.

Difficulty levels

Straight forward actions normally progress automatically.

Contested actions normally involve totalling comparable competency levels for both Us and Them. For passive opposition to difficult tasks only the prevailing environment obstructs player progress. Hence Storytellers may enter an arbitrary difficulty level as a Them value.

One way to gauge difficulty level involves estimating the number of people required to normally attempt a task and multiplying by ten.

A task typically undertaken by 1 person gives a Them value of 10 (ie $1 \times 10 = 10$).

Tasks 2 people normally attempt, such as climbing a dangerous mountain, gives a Them value of 20 (ie $2 \times 10 = 20$).

Tasks usually pursued by teams of ten people, such as securing sensitive data from hackers, gives a Them value of 100 (ie $10 \times 10 = 100$).

Remember that *any* roll involves a chance of setback, thus removing the need to precisely calculate every Them value. If in doubt, give Them a value of 10.

Advantages

Optionally the Us-vs-Them system can also include additional advantages unique to either side. For example if one side holds a unique tactical advantages then enter 1 as their advantage.

Any number of multiple advantages may increase this score. However subsequent advantages yield diminishing returns. Also opposing advantages counterbalance each other. If opponents seem broadly comparable then keep both advantages at nought. Only enter uniquely superior advantages.

Advantages could possibly come from:

- intel, leadership or reconnaissance
- strength, outnumbering or reinforcements
- tactics, crossfire or outflanking
- position, mobility or cover
- psychology, morale or zeal
- equipment, camouflage or armour

For simplicity's sake try limiting advantages to none or the lowest meaningful number.

Ambush

Perceiving hidden threats normally utilises dexterity.

For example an enemy surprising the party could call for an Us-vs-Them roll using total party Dexterity (Us) vs total enemy Intelligence (Them).

Surprise often yields an advantage. A clever ambush might even give two or more advantages. Conversely spotting a very large number of hidden opponents might also give an advantage.

At the Storyteller's discretion, an unwitting party taken by surprise may suffer immediate setbacks. A sly ambush could inflict automatic casualties by employing mechanised weaponry and camouflage.

Optional mission goals

The Us-vs-Them system can also model the success of mission goals in spaceships, vehicles or aircraft. For example, the party could state their intentions as: cruise, evade, stealth, decoy, escape, reconnoitre, data-scrape, disarm, disable, cripple (ie disable & disarm), boarding, rake, strafe, bomb, search or destroy.

d100 simulation

As an alternative to both action-dice and Us-vs-Them, consider using d100 for random events like winning roulette or surviving artillery barrages.

Determine a target number by predicting the percentage chances of an event occurring. This event then happens if a player rolls equal or under that target number.

(Note: percentile dice use 2 ten-sided dice. One numbered 00, 10, 20 ... 80, 90 for tens and one numbered 0 to 9 for units.)

Optionally rolling

- high doubles outside the target range (eg 77, 88, 99, etc.) produce dramatic mishaps
- low doubles within the target range (eg 00, 11, 22, etc.) give amazing successes

Time

Unopposed actions progress after a reasonable duration.

Narrative rhythm should direct the periods of time covered between dice rolls. Resolving the tide of a mass battle could cover a few hours. Fighting a duel might take a few minutes. Initial losses in a skirmish might occur in seconds. Spaceship combat could conclude in a split second.

Tactical situations may resolve very quickly at the table, especially if players describe broad intentions like "escape", "rescue" or "defend".

Where appropriate the Storyteller may ask for further dice rolls particularly when characters encounter meaningful decisions such as noticing changes in their environment, adapting tactics, retreating or choosing to advance.

Storyteller's secrets

The Storyteller (or Game Master or GM) leads the plot and holds the final word when adjudicating any and all outcomes. Players create characters and a Storyteller creates a game world around them with scenes, locations, antagonists and supporting characters.

In such an open universe, a Storytellers uses their best judgement to estimate appropriate numbers. The Us-vs-Them system can then process these estimates to create an instantaneous dice roll.

Only read on if you *run* **Simul** tabletop role-playing games as the Storyteller.

Actions normally succeed

Prioritise the creation of a shared story. Allow reasonable actions to succeed automatically. Only call for a dice roll if the results of failure seem interesting or entertaining or increase dramatic tension.

Consider reserving dice rolls for contested actions opposed by antagonists or when characters attempt tasks very difficult to accomplish.

During investigative mysteries, Storytellers should allow players to progress lines of enquiry without rolling dice. Never let random dice rolls to frustrate a line of enquiry. Characters searching in the right place and asking the right questions should always find relevant clues.

Target numbers for action-dice

Rolling action-dice requires the Storyteller to publicly declare a target number. This inexact process requires a Storyteller to use their best judgement. Simul foregoes rigorous calculations because *every* roll necessarily creates uncertainty.

Very difficult actions may decrease target numbers and conversely easier actions may increase target numbers.

Us-vs-Them functions better than action-dice if characteristic levels approach 60. Prioritise the Us-vs-Them system if players' characteristics advance beyond 60.

Up to nine players

If possible break groups of six or more players into smaller games with fellow Storytellers. Us-vs-Them functions best with under five players. For unavoidably large groups, please use the special Us-vs-Them web page for up to nine players.

Offline play

For offline play save our web pages locally.

Tips

Wherever possible try captivating your players with descriptions of actions, places, people and their environments.

You can treat you supporting characters as simple adversaries overcome by a single dice roll or dialogue, or you could chose to write up a full character sheet for characters significant to your story.

Players frequently pursue unforeseen avenues. So avoid becoming too attached to your plans. Consider leaving space to invent supporting characters based on player choices.

Inventing parts of your story at the table can help include players in a shared narrative. Players normally adventure without fully knowing all your preparations, so you can change your story at will without risking any sense of missing out. If an ad-lib idea proves unconvincing, then simply change track by quickly jumping to your next spontaneous thought.

For improvised adventures, consider the following questions:

- Can a single sentence summarise your adventure?
- What might draw your characters together as a party?
- Can you create a small cast of both friends and enemies with interlocking agendas?
- What motifs introduced at the start might reappear later?
- Who begins your adventure, and where?
- Why might your players care about this place and its people?
- Which potential paths lie ahead?
- How might information flow to your players?
- What scenes might offer players choices?
- Can you jot down any free-floating clues that you could later tie to characters, objects or locations?
- Could any plot tilts surprise or intrigue your players?

Everyone reacting to each other's imagination helps create a shared narrative. The best stories often emerge during play so try building on player contributions by saying “Yes, and...”

Maximise inclusion and enjoyment.

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