INTRODUCTION OR WHAT IS THE SRE?

Most role-players have heard of the SRD. But this is the SRE – the Simple Role-playing Engine. It is a role-playing engine that can be used by folks to play character and story driven role-playing games. My goal is that the "stats" for the character can fit on the back of a business card and that the whole engine is less than a single A4 piece (front and back) of paper giving the GM and the Players more time and freedom to focus on their characters and the game world. It has only two sections – the Characters and the Action Resolution Engine. Which is all I think you really need to have a good game, a way to represent characters with numbers and words, and a way to have those characters consistently interact with others and the world around them.

CHARACTERS

This section does not focus on the specific rules for Character Generation. That will vary from setting to setting (like if the players are peasants or gods ☺). First off you should check with your GM to determine what kind of game you are playing, and what type of player characters he or she is looking for. Second you should sit down and hammer out a concept. Asking yourself questions like who is this person, what do they look like, what are they good at, what are they bad at. Then you can translate into the following form with the help of your GM.

Personal Details (Name, Age, Gender, Race (if applicable), physical description, personality, etc.) This should be the most extensive part of your character sheet, fully fleshing out your character.

(OPTIONAL) Archetype – Some GM's and Players find that using a few words to sum up their character really helps them in the game, like saying they are a Fearsome Barbarian or a Noble Knight Errant.

The Stats (Body, Mind, Soul) – All characters only have three abilities or stats to describe them. They range from 0 to 6+. Average for most people walking around today is 3. For example if your character is not in great shape and couch potato but did really good in school and was top of her class she might have a Body of 2 and Mind of 4. The stats are the core for resolving actions.
Body – The character's physical prowess and ability like strength, agility, manual dexterity, stamina, toughness, fitness, etc.
Mind – The character's mental prowess like intelligence, education, common sense, perception, etc.
Soul – This is a harder one to describe – but think of it as their strength of character, personality, and presence all rolled up into one along with their self-confidence.

Skills & Talents – This should be just a description of any thing your character is good at, or any special powers (like being able to see in the dark). It is not numbers, the GM will use your list to determine when to add modifiers to your Action Checks. For example, taking the couch potato above if the character had really good immune system and never got sick, they might right down (very healthy). Then when the GM made a check to see if that bad sushi made you sick, then he would know to modify your Body of 2.

Flaws & Weaknesses – The opposite of Skills and Talents, things you really suck at, or special vulnerabilities – like allegoric to penicillin, or can't see in bright sunlight.

ACTION RESOULTION

First and foremost – don't make checks all the time. Only when you and the GM feel that the outcome would be in doubt. *But if either of you disagree, then make a check.* Action checks are used for when your character wants to do something. Like hack into that computer, or swing her sword, or whatever. To see if you succeed is simple. The GM sets a difficulty that has a number associated with it. *The difficulties are Trivial (4), Easy (6), Tough (8), Hard (10), and Nearly Impossible (12).* To see if you succeeded you roll a single 6 sided dice (in gamer slang 1d6 ☺) and add it to the appropriate attribute. Also add in any modifiers that you may have for the situation and any skills/flaws. In general the GM determines modifiers, but skills should generally grant you a +1 to your roll, and flaws a –1. Other situations may further modify the roll such as if the situation is really stressful (like trying to hack into a computer in a fixed time limit) or really easy (like taking all day to do something that might normally take a few minutes). These situation modifiers should not change the roll by more than +2/-2 max. So in general the modifiers will be between –3 and +3, but –1 and +1 being most common. The formula below summarizes all this:

Action Check = 1d6 + Stat + Skill/Flaw Modifiers + Situational Modifiers

Some times actions are against other people. In this case of *Resisted Actions* rather than trying beat a difficulty number like 6 for Easy, you just need to do better than the other person, in other words your action check higher than them. But the GM may say that you need to at least make a Trivial (4) or Easy (6) target and be higher than the other person.

What about Combat? Combat is just a resisted action. For example two folks swinging swords at each other make Action Checks, the one with the higher check whacks the other person. A person shooting a gun at someone makes an Action Check to see if they hit (usually minimum of Easy) and the other person makes an Action Check to dodge out of the way. *Note-* GM's may add situational modifiers. For example if you are using a baseball bat and the other guy just has a beer bottle, the GM may give the guy a bat +1 situation modifier, while dodging bullets is tricky, so you might get a –1 to dodge a gunshot, or a –2 if they are using an uzi to spray the area with bullets.

How long does an action take? It depends on the action. But GM's and Players should stick to a common agreement after playing a few sessions. In a heroic cinematic game it might only take a few seconds to pick open the lock, but in a more gritty realistic game it could take a minute or two. For situations that depend on very short actions times and determining who goes first , we call these

scenes like combat, or chases, or if you defuse the bomb in time, GM and Players should do an action check at the beginning of the scene to see who goes first, and stick with that order, letting each player do one thing. That could be shooting a gun, or running, or moving across the room, or working on defusing the bomb or whatever. If a player wants to do two things at once (like fire both of his pistols in a two-fisted John Wu style) or run across the room while shooting, add a –1 multitasking modifier for each action the character does for each action check. So squeezing off three shots from your Colt 45 in one phase of the scene in rapid succession against three bad guys spread across the room would give you a –3 check to each roll. But it can give you some really action packed scenes. Use GM discretion and the stats to figure out things like how far can I run during my phase of the scene, but be consistent, once you decide something stick with it. Make notes on your character sheet, whatever you need to do.

ENVIRONMENT & EQUIPMENT

The last aspect of most role playing games is what is the effect of specific gear like weapons and toolkits, as well as how do you track how injured the character is. Keeping with the simple flavor of the engine, wounds are handled in a somewhat simple way. The number your action checks exceeds the other persons is how injured you are, subtracted from your Body. When your body is less than 0, then you are dead. In the meantime your Body is reduced until you are healed up. How long is healing? Depends on the game and style, but usually 1 point of Body a day for really heroic games and upto to a 1 point a month for grittier ones. While this mechanic is for Body, if you have psychic combat, or drugs, or sickness or whatever the environment is doing to your character, it can also be applied to Mind and Soul as well, although Mind and Soul injuries either heal a lot faster (you got over the fear factor) or a lot longer (you went crazy). Some GM's who want to run a really scary gritty game may say your Mind and Soul never heal. Talk to your GM.

Equipment gives your character a situational modifier. Like having the right tool kit may give you a +1, or the GM may decide that without the toolkit you have a –3. Depends on the equipment. Weapons can be a bit trickier. For a more "realistic feel" give your weapons a maximum damage number. Like a fist may be 1. Meaning that even if you beat the other's guy action check by 6, you only do 1 point of damage. However, if you have marital arts down for a skill the GM may say you can do up to 2. Swords and knives might 2 or 3, while bullets might be unlimited. For a more realistic game, also give some weapons ranges. Beyond the range the GM imposes higher situational modifiers, but you don't have to do that. The GM can just decide during each scene. Same thing goes for armor. If you have fantasy game (which usually has a lot of armor), the armor may absorb a Body point of injury for each whack you take, but be careful the GM might impose a –1 Situational Modifier if you want to climb a wall in your armor or sneak around the castle.

AFTERWARD

Well that is it. That is really I all think you need to have a good role-playing engine - a convention for representing characters and a convention for resolving actions as well as some explanation on injury and equipment. I recognize this is bare bones, but that is what it was meant to be. GM's now have a lot of freedom with this system to customize their favorite ideas into their game world unconstrained by a complicated rules engine, and may have some additional tweaks or formalizations.

WHY IS THERE NO MAGIC SYSTEM?

I believe that magic systems should be setting dependent. I also believe that any rules or conventions automatically define the "flavor" of the magic. So I left it out. If you really need something now – here are two suggestions:

(a) Gritty Like Magic – Characters must perform ceremonies and study crazy books for long times to learn even a simple incantation. Each incantation or spell is a separate Skill & Talent. The GM and player should define what it does and any requirements. An example incantation – "Mind Blast" this incantation turns the victims brains to jelly and causes them to be like a vegetable. Every use of this incantation reduces the caster's mind by 1 for an hour (a splitting headache). The effect of the incantation is that the caster makes a Soul check against the Targets Mind check, the caster gets an automatic +1 situation modifier. So you might represent this on your character sheet as "Mind Blast (1 Mind/1Hour, +1 Sit. Mod., Soul vs. Mind).

(b) Fantasy magic – Just define the general form of magic like element and power level (like a new stat). Let the players be creative with it, the max damage would be stat and the DM would set different Difficulty Levels for different effects (like starting a fire might be Trivial, but creating a raging inferno from the heavens that pours fiery rain on the kingdom Nearly Impossible). The Power Level should be the max damage for any attacks or power of any armor (but the player should have a good reason – fire armor would not be that great ☺). You could also have magic duels where wizards make magic action checks against each other.