N.O.W.

MODERN ACTION ROLE-PLAYING GAME

Now is...

Secret organizations moving to control the world through business and politics...

Technology-laden thieves that steal from wealthy society to give to the poor...

Roaming mercenaries seeking fortune, for themselves or for the downtrodden...

Private eyes that take on any job, big or small, so long as it pays...

Investigators that root out corruption in their own cities, but find much more...

Leaping across rooftops while evading and fighting off ninjas...

Intense battles against overwhelming odds...

Battlefields rippling with explosions and filled by dynamic combatants...

Teams of crime fighters facing off against criminal syndicates and shadow cartels...

Spies clashing on rooftops, at ostentatious events, and in the shadows of society...

Precisely executed covert-operations in war-torn lands...

High tech gadgets and one-of-a-kind vehicles...

Artificially enhanced government operatives working deep behind enemy lines...

Explorers uncovering ancient ruins in search of forgotten lore and treasure galore...

Martial artists performing incredible feats and fighting with deadly efficiency...

Mavericks chasing down those who flee the law, going the places g-men can't...

Vigilantes that stalk city streets in the long hours of the night...

The vestiges of the *O.L.D.* and the beginnings of the *N.E.W.*...

FOREWORD

You can see my first meeting with Morrus at the 2013 ENnies [right here](). I was a young spitfire game designer with a penchant for *weird* things and a work ethic that can't be beat (yay hard labor), and looking back, I can honestly tell you that I did *not* anticipate writing an entire game system for EN World at the time—I was mostly pre-occupied with *being there* and starting to *be somebody*.

In a lot of ways, I was like a first level character.

I like to think I'm level two at this point.

N.O.W. started developing half a year ago (as of this foreword being penned, anyway) while the breakaway *O.L.D. is N.E.W.* Kickstarter blew through stretch goals and funding ramped up to places Morrus didn't know what to do with—as soon as he solicited ideas I put together a robust outline prepared with different ideas. What stuck was one for a game about action movies, a topic very close to my heart; I'm such a fan that I went to school for Film Studies, and if we aren't talking Gilliam, chances are good my favorite films fall into the shoot-em-up and exploding things genre. I've written academic papers about *Last Action Hero*, collected and watched every Jackie Chan film (even *The Spy Next Door*), and generally made it my thing to cheese out with action flicks.

I cannot explain how wildly excited I was when Morrus put me on as a stretch goal, or how crazy amazing it felt when we broke that level of funding. This is by and far my biggest foray into game design thus far and I literally feel like bouncing off the walls (and did at first) whenever I think about *N.O.W.*—I reckon that after playing it, you will as well.

Taking this *bound* was not a simple thing, however, and several people need to be thanked directly for their contributions. Jonathan G. Nelson, owner of AdventureAWeek.com, is chief amongst them, alongside Owen K.C. Stephens and L.J. Stephens. The former saw a diamond in the rough and has been polishing it ever since, and the latter pair have been providing all the mentoring Jonathan skips over. Russ Morrissey, master of EN World and EN Publishing, also deserves a shout out alongside all of the membership of EN World and everyone who backed the *What's O.L.D. is N.E.W.* Kickstarter!

And my wife of course, Stephanie, for convincing me to make that first pitch and being right behind me all the way. You are amazing, female.

Anyway, forget all of that! Shoot things, punch through walls, and start piling up dead bad guys *N.O.W.*!

-Mike Myler

PS: Thanks again to Morrus for giving me a title I can be punny with *N.O.W.* and then.

WELCOME TO *N.O.W.*

N.O.W. is a roleplaying game set in or near the modern day (albeit a very exciting one). Players take on the roles of action heroes and play through scenarios presented to them by a Game Master (GM). The GM creates the universe, the places, the allies and enemies who populate the world, and the adventures that the player characters (PCs) will encounter.

N.O.W. is set at an indeterminate time in the present. Whether there are cell phones or car phones, laptops or DOS, smart links or phone jacks, wifi internet or broadcast television—is ultimately up to you, though the rules for using near-future and near-past technology are all included here. Note that *N.O.W.* is compatible with both *O.L.D.* and *N.E.W.*, so the GM has access to include magic, psionics, and far-future resources within the setting, and that *N.O.W.* is ultimately a supplement to greater increase the versatility of those two games (and, if you just want to kick ninjas in the face or go on a rampage in a jungle war, it is great for that too).

In *N.O.W.* you'll create a character and adventure across the globe with characters created by other players. Your characters might be private eyes, mercenaries, covert ops specialists, spies, loner badasses, masters of martial arts, or vigilantes. They could be a human, augmented in some way, a mutant, or possibly even one of the first genuine robots! Each player creates his or her own player character, decides on a personality, abilities, and attributes, and plays that character through numerous adventures.

N.O.W. allows you to blow up your enemies in style, perform fantastic feats of martial prowess, root out corruption in the dark streets of the city, uncover duplicitous organizations bent on world domination, or make your way across the world as a soldier for hire.

WHAT YOU NEED

To play *N.O.W.* each player will need the following:

- A selection of six-sided dice (referred to as "d6s").
- A character sheet (you can photocopy the one in this book or download one from the internet; at worst, a sheet of scrap paper will do).
- If the GM is using battlemaps to display combat positioning, a small miniature, token, or figurine to represent your character. You can find these in most game stores, but pennies or chess pieces will do in an emergency.
- If you are the GM, you will need a copy of this book and some kind of scenario or adventure.

HOW TO PLAY

This book provides you with the core rules of play. It tells you how to create characters, adjudicate challenges and combat, and more.

During a game of *N.O.W.* the GM will describe the environment and events of the game world, and the players will describe what their characters do within that scenario in a collaborative story-telling manner. Often the success of an action is not guaranteed, at which point you will use your dice to determine the outcome. Some tasks will be more difficult than others, and some characters will be better at certain types of activity than others.

As your character adventures across the globe, he or she will earn or find money and equipment, and will gain experience points which can be spent to improve his or her capabilities by purchasing new careers. These experience points (XP) are awarded to the players by the GM when they complete storylines or defeat challenges and enemies.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is a supplement to be used with *O.L.D. The Roleplaying Game* and *N.E.W. The Roleplaying Game*, but can also be used to run a campaign focused on settings and challenges at home with the action movie genre. It describes how to create characters, adjudicate the game, run combat, and design settings and adventures, amongst other things. The book is divided into four main sections.

I: Character creation. The first section of the book deals with character creation. It takes you through the process of generating new player characters from start to finish, including attributes, heritage, careers, and more, as well as detailing equipment, armor, and weapons that your characters can purchase.

II: Running the game. This is followed by a section which describes how to run a game of *N.O.W.* It covers the core game mechanics, including attribute checks and countdown pools, and the combat rules, along with details on the environment, objects, and movement. It also includes information on chi and a selection of mooks and minions for use in the game.

III: Agencies, cracking, vehicles, and other sundry. This section covers many of the aspects that specifically pertain to games with a twist of adrenaline. Vast secretive organizations, how to hack a computer or build a super car, and several other new rules comprise this part of *N.O.W.*

IV: Building a world. The final section of the book contains guidelines for using *N.O.W.* in conjunction with *O.L.D.* and *N.E.W.*, as well as rules for designing your own setting, heritages, careers, combat locales, enemies, and more. It is a GM's toolkit for campaign and adventure design.

RULE ZERO

The GM is the final arbiter of what happens in the game. If a rule needs to be interpreted, it is the GM who decides how to resolve it. At times, the GM may need to create new rules, or alter existing rules. In other words, the rules in this book should be viewed as guidelines, and should not interfere with or be a hindrance to your game-playing.

The ultimate goal of this game—like any game—is to enjoy it and have fun. There is no right or wrong way to play *N.O.W.* If you're all enjoying yourselves, you're playing it correctly.

THE SETTING

N.O.W. is set in a recent time period, the present, or the very near future in the same way that other games are set in a medieval fantasy universe. That universe might be our own universe, or it might be a fictional one of your own devising. It might be small in scale, encompassing only a small town in Colorado as communist forces make landfall, or it might encompass an entire seaboard with a cast of villains, or be a globe-trotting thrill ride that takes the game across the entire world. Here are some examples of settings:

- The world has been wracked by war and even the forces of battling despots are unlikely to sleep with a belly full of food rather than lead. Experts and mercenaries are the most valuable resources in toppling these warlords, and the only real hope of the downtrodden citizens of Earth.
- In the digital age, information is absolute power. Corporations have risen to the fore of global politics, overshadowing or entirely replacing governments across the world. Those with enough gumption to get off the streets are the pawns of society's elite, working with blackhats and expatriated soldiers in unending (and bloody) corporate warfare.
- Under the nose of governments and corporations alike, vast hidden organizations work to bend the world to their will through commerce, political maneuvering, and espionage. Uncovering the conspiracies that drive the mounting global crises and stopping these duplicitous agencies is a mammoth task, and none yet have managed it—if left to their own devices, the world may not survive the calamities to come.
- Lone survivors, thought dead by their retreating allies, are deep in enemy territory with no chance of backup or rescue. Left without recourse, fighting for their freedom is all they can do; or will a small force of determined warriors be enough to turn the tide of the greater conflict?

N.O.W. What's O.L.D. is N.E.W.

O.L.D. is a companion roleplaying game of medieval fantasy, and *N.E.W.* is a companion roleplaying game of science fiction fantasy. These two games are 100% compatible with both each other and *N.O.W.*; if you want a wizard to appear in the jungles of the Congo before aliens descend onto the White House, you'll find that these three work together perfectly.

Look for the *O.L.D.* and *N.E.W.* roleplaying games from EN Publishing.

A Brief Glossary

This is a short introduction to some of the terms you'll encounter throughout this book. These elements are building blocks for a character—some are bigger, and some are smaller, but when put together they create an overall picture.

Heritage: Your character is one of a number of available heritages (predominantly human). He might be a genetically enhanced human, a grotesque cyborg, a mutant of some kind, or even a full-on robot (though not an android; look to *N.E.W.* for those).

Attributes: Attributes represent a range of core measurable facets of your character in numerical form. These attributes are Strength, Agility, Endurance, Intuition,. Logic, Willpower, Charisma, and Reputation, plus a couple of optional attributes which depend on the campaign model. The higher an attribute, the more your character exemplifies that attribute.

Career: A career is a temporary building block which helps form your character's development. Characters take careers for periods of time during character generation as the process works its way through his life. Each career affects his attributes and skills. For example, a few years spent training in a dojo in downtown Brooklyn might enhance a character's martial skills. At any given time, a character will have a current career.

Skills: Skills are smaller, concentrated packets of interest, expertise, or training. They include things like cooking, pistols, unarmed combat, poetry, cracking, piloting, engineering, and more. Your character will pick up new skills throughout his career. The skill list is open-ended and unlimited; a skill kicks in at any time your character performs an activity related to it.

Exploits: Exploits are individual abilities or benefits. There are different types of exploits—heritage exploits, career exploits, attribute exploits, and universal exploits. Exploits include things like a rebel's talents for acquiring illicit goods, a mutant's unlikely ability to modify the odds of unlikely events, or the ability to make multiple flowing attacks in a deadly flurry,

Descriptor: At the top of the character sheet you will see an area known as the "descriptor". The descriptor presents a number of fundamental things about your character in the form of a single summarizing sentence. It looks like this:

- **John** is a surly, sarcastic old ex-cop who loves being the underdog.
- **Dutch** is a huge, confident adult soldier who knows how to survive no matter the odds.
- **James** is a suave, charming middle-aged spy who makes the most of his professional talents for both himself and his country.
- **Daniel** is a cocky but dedicated young martial artist who excels in ability daily with a disciplined approach to all things.

___[CHARACTER NAME]_____ IS A ___[TRAIT/ ADJECTIVE]____[AGE]_____
___[HERITAGE]_____ [CAREER]_____ WHO ____[HOBBY / TRIVIA]___

The observant reader will quickly note that a character's age is prominent. This is because age is an important facet of a character in *N.O.W.* and is tracked through character generation and career length. If your character spent 8 years in the slammer, that will be reflected not only in his attributes and skills, but also in his age.

There are other component parts to a character, including contacts, equipment, chi techniques, and more. As you can see, *N.O.W.* is a fairly rules "crunchy" and very extendable game.

Experience Points: Characters earn Experience Points by accomplishing tasks, defeating enemies, and completing adventures. These Experience Points (or XP) can be spent on a range of abilities and character improvements.

TERMINOLOGY

Some other terminology is used repeatedly in this book.

Attribute Check: Most activities in the game are based around an attribute check. This is a test whereby one of your attributes determines how many dice you get to roll to accomplish a task such as shooting at an enemy soldier or lifting a heavy object.

d6: A "d6" is a regular six-sided dice. *N.O.W.* is based around pools of dice in which you roll a number of dice, add up the total, and compare it to a target number known as a *difficulty benchmark*. Multiple dice which are rolled and added together are expressed as xd6—for example, 3d6 means "roll three dice and add them together", while "5d6" means "roll five dice and add them together."

Die Bonus: If something indicated that it grants or inflicts a die bonus or penalty (usually in the format "a +2d6 bonus") it refers to additional dice which can be added to (or which must be removed from) your die pool when you make an attribute check.

SCALING

To keep dice pool sizes manageable, *N.O.W.* uses a scaling system. This enables very large and very small elements to use similar sized dice pools. For example, a fighter jet moves a lot faster than a

running man. However, both the man and the fighter jet have SPEED scores in the (probable) range of 2-8 or so. Similarly, an aircraft carrier's machine gun might do 4d6 damage, as does a soldier's automatic rifle. It is not intended that these elements be viewed as approximately equal.

There are three scales used. These are:

- Creature
- Vehicle
- Warmachine

ADVANCEMENT LEVEL

Advancement level is one of two tools a GM can use to peg the tone of his campaign or setting (the other tool is the low/high action scale, below); it's a broad technological scale designed to roughly describe the level of available technology in a given setting. Additionally, any given setting will have a *typical advancement level* and an *advancement value*. The vast majority of *N.O.W.* games have an advancement value between 4-5.5.—the lowest level offers radio and telephones, 4.5 contains everything readily accessible before the spread of mobile digital devices, 5 is roughly equivalent to the modern world of today, and 5.5 contains technologies accessible in our near future (holograms, quantum computers, and cold fusion).

1d6	Advancement Level	Sample Earth Calendar	Advancement value
1	Industrial Age; early automobiles, radio, phone lines	1900-1960	4
2-3	Information Age: early computers, car phones, jets	1970-2000	4.5
4-5	Digital Age: modern computers, cell phones, electric cars	2000-2015	5
6	Quantum Age: flying cars, internal electronics, super computers	2015-2100	5.5

Some examples of popular action movie franchises that have common advancement levels such as *Knight Rider* (4), *X-Men* (5), *James Bond* (4-5), *Lethal Weapon* (4.5-5), *Jason Bourne* (5.5). Some rare groups or organizations might possess an advancement level far beyond the norm but choose not to use it; and some settings or regions may be of a higher advancement level but still not possess specific technologies (in particular, higher sciences and quantum devices are 5.5 level technologies which are setting dependent).

The "default" setting of this book is between 4.5 and 5.

LOW & HIGH ACTION

N.O.W. predominantly focuses on high octane, adrenaline-filled escapades, but can cater to games with fewer mass gun battles and explosions. To differentiate between these varying levels of departure from reality (ultimately determined by the setting you choose to employ), there are action symbols (☆) throughout the book, marking content that's not likely to be found in the real world. A career ability that allows you to shoot a gas tank to cause an explosion (something highly unlikely) has ☆, but an ability that allows you to momentarily ignore several critical bullet wounds—a virtually impossible task —has ☆☆.

PUTTING THE TWO TOGETHER

The *Building Your World* chapter of this book goes into detail on how to fashion your own setting, and how to incorporate your own choices in terms of advancement level and action.

Using a combination of advancement level and the low and high action scale, you can easily peg the tone of a setting. Using these two measures, you can determine which elements of the rulebook are applicable to the setting and which are not. For example, if the setting has a typical advancement level of 4 and a low/high action rating of ☆☆, you will know that the cyborg replacement arm from the *Equipment* section of this book is not available but that a simple prosthetic is. The action rating is referred to in terms of a letter when defining a setting:

Symbol	Category	Type	Example
—	A	Modern Realism	The world we live in.
☆	B	Slightly Surreal	*Hogan's Heroes*, *Miami Vice*
☆☆	C	Explosively Surreal	*Predator*, *Rambo*
☆☆☆	D	Modern Fiction	*Last Action Hero*, *Marvel* cinematic universe, *Sin City*

The "default" *N.O.W.* setting (which is a *Predator*/*Rambo* level setting) would be defined as a level 4.5C setting, and something like *Shoot 'Em Up* (watch it if you haven't) a level 5D setting.

MODERN REALISM [A]

In a modern realism setting, the world is like it is today—folks have cell phones, use the internet regularly, and new technologies emerge every day. Exploding a car or causing property damage is extremely likely to have consequences and some of the game should focus partly on the "real" lives of PCs (who they are dating, problems with their family, and so on).

SLIGHTLY SURREAL [B]

This is the level of realism generally found in television shows like *Knight Rider*, *Matlock*, and *Miami Vice*. Vehicular chases aren't always pulled over by police, missed gunshots don't chance hitting bystanders, and in general the foibles and trappings of modernity are not a big part of the game, though investigation might be.

EXPLOSIVELY SURREAL [C]

Explosive surrealism is like a good story about fishing—just barely past the point of being believable. Shooting a barrel of oil might make it explode, sprinting on a broken leg won't force someone into unconsciousness, and the game involves high adrenaline combats, never parking tickets.

MODERN FICTION [D]

These would be the most outlandish characters and tales. Local police forces may as well not exist, explosions are commonplace, people can fly or shoot lasers from their eyes. Comic books and their adaptations fit most easily into these settings.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT THAT MEANS!

These categories are somewhat arbitrarily chosen as a way of delineating different game setting flavors. If you feel that a given author or show belongs in a different category, that's OK. Your right.

It's also worth noting that nothing fits into a box perfectly. There are always exceptions, and a given setting might fit one category most of the time, except for one or two things.

DEFAULT ASSUMPTIONS

The primary default assumption in this book is that your setting is whatever *you* want it to be. It can be as low or high action and as technologically adept you choose. However, this book does have a sort of "baseline" of its own. They are as follows:

- Traveling across the globe in 24 hours is possible with enough money and time in airports.
- Time travel is extremely rare and if it occurs at all, it is central to important plots.
- Martial artists and other seasoned combatants can perform inhuman feats of physical prowess or mental ability.
- Robots are extremely simple and rarely, if ever, attain sentience (and if they do, it is central to important plots).
- Conflict is never very far away, be it with an unruly gang or opposing military force.

It's easiest to envision *N.O.W.* as being somewhere around the *Predator/Rambo* level on the scale. As mentioned above, however, you can tweak both the advancement level and low/high action scale up or down to suit your own setting.

A LOT THAT'S FAMILIAR

You may see ideas throughout this rulebook that are familiar to you. This is deliberate. *N.O.W.*'s goal isn't to create a new fiction (although it does play with the edges of that) but to capture existing paradigms and put them into mechanical form. This is for those who watch an amazing action film and feel they want to role-play in that setting, or, if not the setting itself, in a setting with some of the feel and assumptions of it in place. It's here to help you run a game inspired by your favorite adrenaline junkie flicks.