

**DAVID:** Thanks Gordon for the great question and Ron for the great answer about Maelstrom Storytelling. I have looked at a few "weird" games from the 90s this year, including Obsidian and Waste World. These games look interesting but they really beat you over the head not only with the setting, but with factions, powers, etc. in the typical World of Darkness style. They still look fun but I have to really make space for all of that stuff and I am not eager to do it. Maelstrom Storytelling was a really refreshing read on that front, so I actually wonder if the whole unfixed, swirling, ineffable setting is also a statement about those trends. I also wonder if taking away the setting and trying to make a universal system is an attempt to provide something more conventional for people to play with. The Maelstrom world itself has a lot of potential for different genres and tropes, but it seems like it will always retain its identity as the lava lamp chaos world. So I am curious what Story Engine does offer and I wonder if it does throw the baby out with the bath water.

- **My reply:** You've articulated it much better than I did. I am still inclined toward Maelstrom, not because I know it throws out the baby for sure, but because I don't see value added by "play anything" as opposed to playing, you know, this reasonably enticing lava-lamp setting. I played the hell out of Obsidian 2000-2001, with its primary author Dav Harnish. It has a lot of strong features which became stronger when he almost visibly let go of the Shadowrun-model of play that he and the other authors had perceived as "how to play." The second printing included excellent rules revisions on that basis, and I like all the supplements (Inside the Zone, Demon Codex, Wastelands) which were also finalized with a much wider, whatever happens happens perspective on play. The game was always more intelligent than any of its RPG models and matured in front of me. It still definitely falls into the category of "choose the 10% you'd like to play and ignore everything else" which is practically obligatory for me with these clan-heavy self-consciously metaphysical romantic-nihilist games.

**PEDRO:** "Curse you Pedro, more Champions Now to play in my future." Mission accomplished. Seriously though, that was a good short distillation of your thoughts on the matter. And given that I'm familiar with some of your material at Comics Madness, what you mentioned here needs no further clarification as far as I'm concerned. And the actual "sub-routine" speculation in CN terms at the very end was enlightening enough to me given that contextual familiarity. Curiosity satisfied, thank you very much.

**JESSE:** I should have linked my question to a thought I had a few years ago. I was re-reading Sorcerer & Sword and I was reflecting on how many games I had been calling "Sorcerer & Sword" but actually didn't lean very deeply on that text. I would use the descriptors and some of the additional demon concepts like "Imminent" to justify more free roaming demons or something but that's about it. I had come to think of these games as "Sorcerer in Fancy Dress". Now I see that I was doing that because I was on-boarding concepts not only for the other players but for myself!

**LORENZO:** "Unwieldy" was an exceptionally bad choice of word, but I guess in my mind it projected the idea of "occupying a lot of play space" rather than being difficult or unwelcome to do.

Observing play as it happened/is happening and preparation, it has become very clear to me that this heritage is fairly hard to ignore: it began as a somewhat pedestrian conversion work - because you're completely right several times across both answers in that a lot of this stems

from "I like that from Runequest, but the group picked Mythras and it's not there, so I'm kinda bummed and trying to find ways to avoid throwing a mental tantrum". The more I did the more I noticed how these elements seem to be the answer to the "Why should I play this?" question. It's hard to get into the specifics without talking about what we're doing in play, but let's just say that the idea that this is what people set out to do as the goal of play makes a lot of sense. My perspective of it has changed through experience since I asked the question, for what it's worth.

Thanks for the perspective on Experience Rolls. I think the clarification on how players making the choices on their character progression is absolutely rooted in the fiction and experience of play is very useful, because my formulation probably suggested that the two approaches are exclusive and one is preferable and that's not how I feel about it. At best it's a chicken and egg situation.

I think it feels a bit incoherent for this game specifically, however, because (and I may be completely wrong here) I feel the potential for players to still make plans for their character's evolution really makes some of the mechanics shine - a character who's not particularly competent at something may set out to try it (which while potentially abusable has already prompted a lot of player initiative already) but more importantly may seek a master, a guild, a cult. This is limited to my experience so far, but it has prompted situations such as a character wanting to become better at combat while there was not much combat going on having to seek out someone who could train him (with the resulting relationship being an highlight of play) or - to be extremely succinct about it - a character setting out to be a better con artist having to go around and con people, with the huge cascade of social consequences connected to it.

In fact you've made me realize that in absence of all the elements of the first part of the question, I would probably consider this "learn by doing" approach a potential trap that could introduce a lot of performative play. But in this game where there's such a strong social and cultural context, needing to interact with someone in order to grow feels extremely productive.

Thanks again for the answers!