

Apocrypha

The Children of Lorath

Extracting what I like

Apocrypha includes 11 races to choose from in a somewhat wacky SF-ish modern city. It's sort of like Orbit in that way. But unlike Orbit, it's not fun and crazy – it's a bit light-hearted, but also supposed to be dramatic and “story”-ish, and most especially insightful about the races.

I prefer the text's stated option of the single-race story ... but taking it even further, and jettisoning their multicultural setting. A Lorath-only game, isolated and refined to them alone. I'd originally thought it would be good to play with humans, Loraths, and halfbreeds, but changed my mind – the “human view” is already present, in ourselves. The presence of fictional humans would merely muddy the issues.

Check out the material about them I photocopied from the book.

Some comments on the source text

All that biz about perfect honesty, perfect intimacy, and idyllic families is clearly crap. Yes, the Lorath do not deceive one another at the level or in the ways that we do. They can understand one another in ways which, in humans, would override our deceptive mechanisms in a moment. They have mind-to-mind contact, empathetic confirmation, and so on ...

But not all Lorath have all the abilities. No ability use is guaranteed successful. And even if they do use the right abilities, and if they work, to imagine that Lorath individuals would experience no conflicts of interest simply because they can understand what one another wants ... well. I think not.

The issue is not whether Lorath deceive one another, but how much, in what ways, and about what. What would be perfect honesty between two humans may only be a veil for them, sometimes.

The Premise

What is intimacy? In a world of texture and triangulation, how does it differ from simple contact? How does it translate to emotion and relationships? Toss in psionics, and all this gets tied into questions of honesty and identity.

One more twist: the Jedi look of the psionic swords is misleading, as they are simply tools. But they do offer the perfect interface of mind (intent) and body (commitment, consequence), as the ultimate form of conflict resolution. Or do they? Is killing, among the Lorath, an act of perfect honesty or the perfect tool for deception?

Setting details for us to consider

Who is an authority among Lorath? The most sincere person, or the least? Is justice communally administered? How? What recourse does a dissident individual have?

Is personal combat different for the Lorath? They are terrifyingly deadly, when skilled. It probably wouldn't come about due to mutual misunderstandings ... but perhaps there might be some kind of community recognition of two people's bound and determined mutual desire to kill one another. The obvious solution is to let them try. But might that not lead to paid duellist-assassins?

Is inter-community governance and commerce a concern? Is the church a government in any way? Are there resources to trade across communities, and does that create conflicts of interest? For that matter, what's money to a Lorath? What good is telepathy in such transactions when all it will tell you is that the other guy is determined to get the better of a deal?

And how about that biology! The value of an individual female is huge, and outbreeding (presuming standard genetics) is a major priority, suggesting a clan structure. Does a female's status change once she's had her one reproductive shot? How do mate-choice, commitment, actual mating, and parenting interrelate? What is parenting, anyway? Do Lorath undergo a subadult stage? And one really nasty question: do they have any form of reliable contraception?

Senses

The text is pretty sketchy on this, and I think the assumption is that you just play a Lorath as if he or she were sighted. However, that is boring, so I suggest the following.

- All Lorath take "Crippled Sense" at 6 for sight, gaining no points for it. The penalty applies to all actions which would be aided by sight. Note, therefore, that it does *not* apply in darkness. Also, all activities which work *only* through the use of sight are essentially impossible for a Lorath.
- All Lorath have the Awareness: Space ability, but they must pay for it and are variably good at it. Passive use operates primarily as a backup to behaviors that we would associate with a highly skilled blind person, working in an optimized and culturally reinforced environment. To get oriented during rapid action requires an active use of the ability.

Technology and weapons

The text's setting is a modern or just postmodern city teeming with eleven different races, most of which are just as quirky as the Lorath, all more-or-less in tune with modern urban life. Technology is essentially our own with a little science-fiction buzz painted on. On the other hand, Lorath culture and technology are described at a far less modern level.

I like that idea. The Lorath taken in isolation (and jettisoning the larger setting completely) might be considered more at the level of mid-nineteenth century Europe, before the really major shift of the Industrial Revolution. Local agriculture would still be the backbone of any community, and transportation is effective across long distances, but not frequently and not in masses.

Hence, yes, lots of weapons and even sophisticated Newtonian tech, but no assembly-line production. It's interesting to consider a Lorath with a gun, which would depend on a Space skill check (quite likely opposed) ... and therefore limited in range. Grenades and shotgun-type weapons would be a different story.

The system

Resolution is interesting. The target number is equal to the sum of all the scores involved, and you roll d6 equal to the number of scores involved. So for a typical skill, which is based off two scores and is also considered a score of its own:

Strength 3 + Will 5 + skill 4 = 12, and roll 3d6, trying to get 12 or less.

Some rolls are based off one score (e.g. most Gifts) and therefore only use 1d6, and so on.

Two features make this system a little less mechanical. (1) You can often use augmenting rolls, counting the difference between rolled value and target number on one roll as an increase in

target number for the second roll. (2) When an attribute score of 5 or higher is involved, you may re-roll any one of the dice.

In many cases, especially weapons and damage, the difference between roll and target number is multiplied for establishing points of damage.

On a larger scale, many features of characters are not merely descriptive of the strength and dexterity and so on, but are relationships or even weird stuff like “prophetic nightmares.” What this does is permit a HeroQuest-like approach in which relationship rolls can be used for resolution, or various Gift rolls might be used to set up conflicts. As written, the game puts any and all of this stuff on the GM, but I don’t see any reason to keep it that way.

Important system tweak discussion

Clearly the Background and Gift Aspects are crucial for our purposes. Lorath exist in a webwork of social ties and degrees of psionic contact. For the GM to play all the NPCs seems as if he’d be playing “into character space” to a great degree.

Should we have some kind of “web” in which a given player-character constructs, for which other Lorath are attuned to the character? Do the Positioning Aspects help with that? How should we handle it?

K, make up the characters!

Here’s the most important point: do not make a plausible but essentially meaningless character. Saying “He’s a Special Forces veteran” and optimizing him for combat is not going to accomplish anything. *Do not hide*. If the character isn’t a walking Premise monster, then he’s furniture. Use the Background Aspects and General Gifts as the basic framework.

So that means that tons of stuff which are not features of formal character creation in the text are actually the most important. Profession, status, age, sex, and so on are clearly the center of what we’re up to.

You get 44 points for Attributes. All must be spent. Note that scores above 4 cost more. Modify: +3 for Charisma, +1 Perception, -1 Dexterity.

You get 60 Aspect points for Skills, Backgrounds, and Traits. Note that some are negative, so record all negative points as well as unspent ones. You may decide to spend them here (in this category) after all. If not, save’em. Original Traits are highly, highly recommended. The ones given in the text are mostly generic-gamer stuff, and the text (to give it credit) does recommend coming up with your own.

You get 30 points to spend on Gifts. This counts for General Gifts as well as Heritage Gifts, but in our case, the Heritage Gift of Psionics doesn’t have to be paid for – just the abilities within it. Again, record all unspent and negative points; you can spend them now on Gifts or save’em.

Take your negative Gift points, multiply by two; add the result to negative Aspect points. These are Flaw points and may be spent to raise an Aspect or Trait by 1, per point, or a Gift by 1, per 2 points.

You get 15 Whimsy points. Any or all may be spent on any new Aspect as long as it’s only Color. You may choose not to spend some or all of these points, but they are lost. There is no such thing as negative Whimsy points.

Calculate your Dodge, Stun Points, and Life Points.