

# SORRA: A BASIC SCIENCE FANTASY SETTING

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**For the list of all changes, see the website.**

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- You are free to modify Sorra in your own Sorra-based products, but must always make it very clear that you are doing so.
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Eventually the author may seek to produce hard copies of Sorra. In the event this occurs this section of the text will be updated.

*Sorra is a vast universe filled with countless stars and worlds, all waiting to be discovered and explored.*

*What follows is a foundation to fill in with your own details. The content provided below only has one purpose: to offer a shared stage that acts as a springboard for your own creativity. A Sorra-based setting, i.e. a setting that fully conforms to this text, can be as high-tech or as or low-tech as you like, or with high magic or low magic. Each Sorra-based setting can be vastly different **despite sharing the same universe.** Somewhere in Sorra is everyone's Sorra-based setting!*

## **THE UNIVERSE CALLED “SORRA”**

The inhabitants of this setting only rarely use the word “universe”. Instead, they refer to the universe as “Sorra”. They virtually never use the word “universe” unless they are referring to a different universe, real or imagined, or in the phrase, “the universe of Sorra”. There is no known evidence for why this is so. The precise origin of the name is unknown, though many beliefs and theories abound.

## **THE SIZE OF THE SETTING**

Sorra is however large you want it to be, being anywhere from a single continent on a single world, to spanning multiple galaxies. That being said, if someone's Sorra-based setting conforms to all the information in this text, then it exists somewhere in every other Sorra-based setting!

## **REGARDING HISTORY**

No known recorded history goes back more than 5,000 years. Anything beyond that is shrouded in only legend and myth.

Furthermore, no known government has lasted more than about 1,000 years. At the end of that time it either collapses from within or is swallowed up from without. Either way it's replaced by something else entirely. In fact, almost no government makes it more than around 500 years without at least undergoing a significant shift or other change. Names, religions, and general cultures can seemingly last forever, but not governments or borders.

Recorded histories only agree on at least three things. First, every world's history has their people's earliest records (or myths) speaking of arriving from off-world, whether on their own steam or being seeded there. No one knows the origin of their race or species. Second, the oldest histories speak of ancient and powerful beings, but seem quite vague on the topic. Third, preservers are found in every recorded history all the back to the beginning of the record.

Whether or not the various recorded histories and myths and legends have commonalities beyond these things is up to you.

## **THE OLD ONES**

Before the beginning of any recorded history, there existed the Old Ones. These were different races and species of immense technological and/or magical power. They seemed to have been everywhere, as their mysterious ruins are sprinkled throughout Sorra. In some places they are common, but in others they can be uncommon or even rare.

Preservers (see below) treat these ruins as sacred, though they will not make their long-term homes in them... or allow anyone else to do so. Preservers also predictably have a better understanding of them, though they rarely share their secrets, and even when they do it's not an eager activity, and is deemed needed for some reason. However, despite their obvious love for the ruins of the Old Ones, preservers don't spend much time in them, and do not always feel the need tag along with those entering them. For the most part, preservers feel that the ruins can take care of themselves, and whatever people find in them can be policed outside of them (if necessary).

It should be noted that the magic of the Old Ones does not appear to have suffered any limitations. Unlike the present magic of Sorra, the magic of the Old Ones could seemingly do anything! But magical artifacts from pre-history are rare, and tend to have detrimental effects on those who use them. The effects vary, but none are desirable.

One curious fact about all known ruins of the Old Ones is that they have no historical records. It's as if the Old Ones made a conscious, deliberate decision to wipe clean all knowledge of the past. But that being said, sometimes they weren't quite as thorough as they obviously meant to be...

## **TECHNOLOGY AND THE PRESERVERS**

Measuring the technology of Sorra is a little more complicated than one might imagine, as not only does it tend to vary, but also because science and technology are strictly capped by an enigmatic and ubiquitous race known as the preservers.

Preservers bear a strong resemblance to humans, but exhibit the following physical characteristics:

- Androgynous in appearance and biologically sexless. They reproduce through artificial means, growing new preservers in pod-like machines.
- Overly thin, gaunt, gangly appearance.
- Skin is a hue of gray, green, blue, or orange, varying in boldness and brightness.
- An average height of about 7 feet (213cm).

In regards to mind and demeanor, the preservers usually seem totally emotionless, though now and then they may exhibit some mild, but always surprising, degree of feelings. Mentally they are brilliant, having an average intelligence far above that of the typical human.

As a race, the preservers seem to have little interest in anything but technology. But even in that regard, their interest is not in creating new technology, but in preserving what already exists... hence the name they have given themselves.

Preservers are everywhere. They deliberately seek to be wherever other races and intelligent species are. Yet, socially, they have little or no interest in interaction, even among themselves. They come together, or interact with other races, almost entirely for utilitarian purposes alone. Additionally, family,

tribe, nation, culture, and even friendship mean nothing to a preserver's way of life. When there is nothing useful for them to be doing, they just sleep, and can even hibernate for long periods.

But that being said, the preservers deliberately maintain a degree of infamy among other races. They hoard the most powerful technologies for themselves, and use it to keep all other races from progressing too far in science and technology. However, it's been noted that they don't seem to have a fixed level of progress at which they draw the line. Sometimes, inexplicably, they permit more research and development than at other times, or even permit more in one place than another. Some have theorized that the preservers purposefully want to keep everyone on their toes.

Whatever the case, the end result is that different areas of Sorra can have vastly different levels of technology. Some worlds (or systems, or sectors, or even galaxies) might be permitted a *Star Trek*-like degree of technology, while others bear more resemblance to the tech of *Star Wars*, while yet others may not even be permitted to understand how anything works beyond a pre-industrial level, with the preservers themselves ferrying people through the skies and from world to world. The preservers may even allow for some advanced technologies but not others, such as allowing for starships to be understood and constructed, but not explosives or firearms, leaving everyone with star-spanning vessels but only pre-industrial weapons.

There are, however, certain technologies that do not seem to ever be permitted. Traveling backward through time, for example. Any attempt to research and undertake that sort of temporal displacement is always wiped out by the preservers. The preservers have also shown themselves to be without tolerance for the development of devices that can create portals into other realities, save for those realities that serve as “conduits” for FTL travel. Further forbidden areas include any development toward slowing the aging process or stopping it completely.

Every preserver acts as a spy for this grand purpose of keeping tech limited, and even create machines to spy as well. The species is utterly united in this goal to keep every race technologically under foot, and they have been successful for as long as every known group's recorded history. Notably, the preservers do not seem to have any sense of pride or accomplishment in doing what they do, and they clearly have no desire to conquer or rule. But if asked, the preservers will answer that they are only carrying out the purpose for which they were created. As for who created them, either the preservers don't know, or they aren't saying.

If people happen to come across (overly) advanced technology, the preservers will sometimes intervene, but also sometimes won't. Their primary concern isn't really keeping advanced tech out of non-preserver hands, but in making sure that such tech cannot be replicated, and that it doesn't pose a threat to the preservers themselves. But even outside of these reasons, the preservers have been known to clamp down on discoveries at times.

When attacked, preservers will sometimes defend themselves, but at other times they won't. But if they do defend themselves, the attacker is likely in for a beating! It is common wisdom to not provoke the preservers.

## **MAGIC IN SORRA**

How would Sorra be science fantasy without magic as well? Mages and different forms of magic exist, though the potential power of magic and the number of mages may vary from place to place.

No one ever creates a form of magic, but instead they only discover it, and recognize it as something distinct. Likewise, no one ever adds to a form or refines it, but in actuality discovers more of it or how to better utilize it. Furthermore, there are often multiple forms of magic that can accomplish the same thing, but remain separate even so. Some forms are more extensive in what they can do than others, and some forms are more powerful than others in one or more areas.

Each form of magic has a particular “feel” or “signature” that can be sensed by those with the ability to do so. Each form also has its own way of doing things; it's own “nature”. Each form tends to encourage and develop a certain way of thinking. For this reason the more powerful a magic user, the more absorbed they are by the nature of their power. Mages are changed by their magic, and that change runs deeper the more powerful a mage becomes. Each form of magic could be said to have a certain “personality” and set of “interests”, and mages of a form increasingly reflect them. They retain their individuality, but that individuality itself conforms in many ways to the power coursing through it.

For various reasons (often unknown), forms of magic can ebb and flow in their power and ability. They also tend to thrive more in certain areas than others, and/or more in certain bloodlines, people-groups, or even sexes. And sometimes a form of magic simply fades away, leaving its adherents powerless, while at other times new forms are discovered by mysteriously inspired individuals.

Therefore in some areas of Sorra, magic is not very broad in its utility, and neither is it very potent. But in other areas the opposite is the case.

Religions tend to spring up around forms of magic, in an attempt to explain and understand their source and nature. In other cases, new forms of magic are discovered that seem to flow out of a pre-existing religion, as if the existence of a religion created a magic for itself. This is part of the mystery of magic. To explain this, some have theorized that faith can create new forms of magic, though this ability, if real, has certainly not shown itself to be predictable or reliable.

Magic has its limits, though, regardless of its form. For some examples, no known form of magic can...

...return life to dead flesh.

...return souls to their dead bodies.

...create or mend a soul.

...otherwise manipulate souls in any fashion.

...stop or slow the aging process.

...create portals into other realities, aside from those “conduit” realities used for FTL travel.

...allow travel backward through time.

Note, in some places magic is referred to as “psionics”, and its practitioners “psions”. There are other names for magic and its users as well.

Lastly, some mages have tried to resist the powerful technology of the preservers, seeking

technological freedom. While they may have been able to overpower the group of preservers they targeted, no known recorded history features any mage or group of mages not eventually being overwhelmed by streaming masses of preservers, all armed to the teeth and brilliant.

## **METHODS OF INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL**

In the universe of Sorra there are many different forms of FTL (faster-than-light) travel, some purely technological, others purely magical, and some are even made up of both! Truly, any fashion of traveling between worlds that you can think of exists somewhere in Sorra. *However, it's rare for anyone to be aware of more than two kinds of FTL travel.*

## **RACES AND SPECIES AMONG THE STARS**

In the setting of Sorra, the common races are at least these: humans, elves, dwarves, gnomes (also called halflings), orcs, and goblins. Other races (common or uncommon) are up to you. But any additional race should usually follow the *Star Trek* general rule of looking like humans in makeup. Every humanoid, human-like race is sexually and genetically compatible, and can potentially produce offspring with one another without outside help.

But what about sentient, intelligent species that *don't* look like humans in makeup? Such species, note, are indeed *different species*, rather than different *races*. They are not sexually or genetically compatible with the species that makes up humans, elves, dwarves, gnomes, orcs, goblins, or similar. They ought to be quite alien in appearance. Separate species such as this are uncommon or even rare in the universe of Sorra, though they too share the same similarities in their histories.

### *Humans ~*

The humans of Sorra are no different than those of our own Earth. They are the most common race in Sorra.

### *Elves ~*

Typically a high-minded and generally aloof race, elves have little interest in war, power, wealth, or fame. Their natural interests lie in philosophy, magic, mysticism, spirituality, and science (though not necessarily in that order). They tend to produce more mages, scientists, and scholars than the other common races. Physically, elves appear the same as humans, though with pointy ears (of varying lengths), a generally slim build, and carrying a certain “mystique”. (Though elves are not necessarily attractive.) They age at the same rate as humans for their first 25 years or so, and then at only 1/5 the speed, making them able to live about 500 years if they have good genes and health. The average life expectancy is about 275 years. Elves and dwarves tend to have a hard time getting along.

### *Dwarves ~*

The typical dwarf naturally loves stuff – possessions – more than anything else. They love searching for stuff, finding stuff, hoarding stuff, making stuff, and selling stuff. “Stuff” can be money, but can also be anything else. Money is just one kind of stuff. Violence, note, is not a popular method among the race for getting more stuff. It's considered too costly. Dwarves would generally prefer to cut a deal. Dwarves tend to produce more mechanics, merchants, and treasure hunters than the other common races. Physically, they're about 2/3 the average human height for their sex, but with the same girth. This gives them a thick, stocky appearance. They're also more hairy than the typical human, and the males tend to maintain strong beards. They age at the same rate as humans for their first 25 years or so, and

then about 1/3 the speed, making them able to live about 310 years if they have good genes and health. The average life expectancy is about 175 years. Elves and dwarves tend to have a hard time getting along.

#### *Gnomes ~*

Though less common than humans, elves, and dwarves, gnomes are nevertheless not an exotic sight. Like elves, they have little interest in war, power, wealth, or fame, but otherwise are much the same as humans... except perhaps for an higher tendency to get into (or create) trouble. There's a certain subtle whimsy to the typical gnome that makes them somewhat prone to relatively innocent mischief. Some call gnomes “halflings”, though not many gnomes are fond of the term. Physically, gnomes are typically a bit shorter than dwarves, but have human proportions. They otherwise look human. Gnomes age at the same rate as humans.

#### *Orcs ~*

Like gnomes, orcs are not as common as the other common races, but perhaps in this case that's a good thing. The typical orcs has a strong natural tendency toward aggression and violence, and orcish societies tend to revolve around these things. But this isn't to say that orcs are any more naturally evil than the other common races, they're just far more aggressive. Even the good among them would prefer to solve their problems with intimidation and violence, though they practice consideration and self-control. Physically, orcs are the same height as humans, but the typical orc is noticeably more muscular. Their skin tends toward a gray, green, or blue hue, though it's always light. The features of an orc are relatively “severe”, though are mostly human-like, save for their ears, which are elf-like, and the presence of short, tusk-like teeth in their lower jaw. Mentally, orcs are not known for their intelligence or creativity, though despite lower average intelligence and creativity being common, some orcs often find themselves underestimated. Putting aside their love of fighting, orcs tend to live almost as long as humans on average. Orcs have a difficult time fitting in with humans, elves, dwarves, and gnomes.

#### *Goblins ~*

This race is best described, physically, as the gnomish or dwarvish equivalent of orcs, sporting the height and build of a gnome or dwarf, but otherwise the appearance of an orc. Mentally and in regards to demeanor, they are like again like orcs in that they tend to be less intelligent and creative, though they are not given to the same preference for violence. In personality and interests they often exhibit commonalities with gnomes or dwarves, though are usually more brutish in expression. Goblins have lifespans comparable to that of humans. Like orcs, goblins tend to have a hard time finding a place among other races. Orcs and goblins are therefore more often found together than apart.

*There are also many sub-races of these races.*

## **GLAMOURS**

Among humans, elves, and gnomes an amazing – and tragic – thing sometimes occurs: the birth of a “glamour”. Physically, a glamour is someone with bright orange skin, featuring literally sparkling hair that is white, green, blue, or purple. Every glamour is also strikingly attractive, whether due to cuteness or sexiness. They don't even ever get sick, somehow managing to be completely illness and disease-free throughout life. Glamours learn very fast and seem to be gifted in every area. As children, they are prodigies at whatever they put effort into. But every glamour is also a sad story, because the average life expectancy of a glamour is only 25 years. Some die as young as 18, while others make it as far as

32. None have been known to live longer. Once their terminal age is reached, a glamour begins to age rapidly, and over a period of typically three months they become elderly and pass away.

The birth of a glamour is uncommon to rare, and seems totally random. There doesn't seem to be any way to predict their appearance. And if a glamour reproduces, their children are no more likely to be glammers than any other child.

The life of a glamour is often very hard. Everyone around them finds them fascinating, beautiful, and desirable (in virtually every way), and has very high expectations of them.

## **DRAGONS**

Sorra is home to many staples of fantasy, not the least of which is the presence of those massive, terrifying creatures known as dragons. Dragons are one of the sentient, intelligent species of Sorra that isn't humanoid or human-like. Compared to humans, they are often quite alien in their thoughts, and aren't altogether able to enjoy conversation with the human-like species as a result. The mind and heart of a dragon is considered to be inscrutable. Though highly intelligent, dragons also have no desire to pursue science or technology, and tend to prefer living in relative isolation, even from other dragons.

The morality of a dragon can vary as much as a human's, though grasping how a dragon understands right and wrong can often be a challenge.

Some races of dragon are able to fly beyond the skies, even into space itself! In fact, some even choose to live there, between the worlds.

Dragons have the ability to understand any language spoken to them, though no one has the ability to understand a dragon unless the speaking dragon chooses to be understood. Note, however, that dragons never vocally speak. They communicate only through telepathy.

Despite various myths and legends of dragons being inherently magical creatures, this isn't true. While some dragons are indeed able to use magic, not all of them can.

As for the life expectancy of a dragon, it varies from race to race. But no dragon is known to have lived over 2,000 years, and even that seems to be a long time, even for them.

## **UNIVERSAL UNDERSTANDING**

There are countless languages and dialects among the stars, some old and many relatively new. But it doesn't matter much, as somehow every member of the humanoid, human-like species is able to understand each other's spoken words. But it's known that not everyone is speaking the same language, as different languages are still heard. They are all simply understood... even if they've never been heard before. However, if someone has never actually learned a language, they cannot speak it or think in it themselves, but only understand it when it's heard. It's one of the great mysteries of Sorra! Many mages and scientists have studied it, but none have been known to have found an answer that proved conclusive.

When it comes to reading, the mysterious power of understanding doesn't hold. A form of writing must always be learned before it can be understood.

Now, if a machine speaks a language someone doesn't know, understanding doesn't hold here either. The words have to be spoken from the mouth of a living being of the same humanoid, human-like species. (Long-distance, real-time communication, such as a radio, counts as being from the mouth of a living being. But recordings do *not* count.)

## **FAITH IN SORRA**

Faith plays a major role in the daily lives of everyone in Sorra, just as it does here in our world. Many faiths abound, and are bolstered by science and/or magic, along with tradition and casual observation. A life-faith, note, doesn't require the pursuit of a supernatural being (whether in worship or obedience). It could simply be a faith that serves as more of a philosophy of life than a means to something above or beyond it.

As for deities, many are worshiped in the universe of Sorra, but none seem eager to reveal themselves to the masses. Unpredictable visions and sightings are limited to a few stories here and there among the faithful (or even not so faithful). In other words, much is left desired in the area of evidence. But, with magic clearly existing as it does, and with such mystery, who knows? Perhaps there are indeed supernatural entities waiting out there, beyond the stars, far from the people of Sorra yet very close...

## **THE AFTERLIFE AND GHOSTS**

No one in Sorra is able to prove what happens after death. There is apparently a great divide between the present world and the one to come... if indeed there is any to come at all. No known person has ever returned from a realm of death, and no known person one has ever looked into one from Sorra.

There are, however, spirits of the dead to be found here or there. But, thanks to studies in magic and science, it's often a common belief that any such spirits are not actually the dead themselves, but a crude, limited echo somehow created upon the original person's death. These spirits are generally single-minded in some sort of desire, and are driven passionately (and perhaps even violently) toward that desire's satisfaction.

These spirits are not conversationalists, even if they might speak. Attempts to get them to talk about their current state, or what they see and experience from their perspective, are virtually fruitless. They do not reason as those in flesh do. All they care about is their desire, whatever it is.

Such echo-spirits (or "ghosts", if you will) can linger for a long time before fading away, though such a fading is always the final destination. Being exorcised or satisfied speeds up the process.