



VICTORY THROUGH NONVIOLENCE IN *DISNEY'S LORCANA*

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how the nonviolent victory condition of questing to achieve twenty lore in *Disney's Lorcana* subverts typical CCG conventions, player expectations, and maintains alignment with Disney's brand identity of "goodness, kindness, and innocence." *Lorcana* is worth analyzing because it diverges from CCGs that require eliminating an opponent's health. The mechanics of questing, character willpower, and challenging (the game's version of combat) are how the game maintains Disney's brand identity. These mechanics demonstrate how CCG language is deescalated to imply a reduced level of violence. *Lorcana* would be less unique if it had the typical victory condition of attacking an opponent's health, and the game would not have the Disney feel if it were as violent as *Magic the Gathering* or *Hearthstone*.

Keywords

Disney's Lorcana, collectible card game, CCG, mechanics, violence, Disney brand, winning, lore

Introduction

It is typical, if not the standard practice, for collectible card games (hereafter CCGs) to involve a high level of confrontation in their mechanics. Creatures attack opposing creatures and health points, resulting in violence being commonplace within the genre. *Disney's Lorcana*¹ (hereafter *Lorcana*) however, skews the level of confrontation, reducing it in favour of mechanics that align with Disney's brand identity. This article builds on arguments in game studies that advocate for fewer combat mechanics in games. Scholarly discussions revolve around the deemphasis of violence to instead highlight love and physical intimacy, affection, and to break away from the combat simulation that permeates the role-playing game genre. I use these scholarly arguments to demonstrate the ongoing discussion into which *Lorcana* emerges, one where nonviolence is salient and that *Lorcana's* mechanics fit within the nonviolent context that scholars are interested in.

¹ Ryan Miller and Steve Warner, *Disney's Lorcana* (Ravensburger, 2023), <https://www.disneylorcana.com/en-GB/>.



Figure 1: Photo of Lorcana cards. Photo by author.

Additionally, I analyze ongoing discussions regarding Disney's cultural and corporate impact such as disavowing nostalgia to look at Disney's business practices, the treatment of Disney character identities, and their emphasis on catering to children. Addressing these scholarly commentaries provides a foundation to examine Lorcana as a Disney product that is informed by Disney's past, present, and future, and participate in the critique of Disney as a company and its products to reveal their impact on contemporary culture. A discussion of contemporary CCGs reveals the prominence of violence as a victory condition, which is contrary to the Disney brand. The article focuses on *Lorcana* and its mechanics such as questing and lore, willpower, and challenging. I argue that through the inclusion of nonviolent victory condition (questing for lore), *Lorcana* subverts the CCG player expectation that conflict must be violent and thus maintains alignment with Disney's brand identity.

There are many reasons why I think *Lorcana* aims to emphasize nonviolence in its mechanics. Some of these I take up in this article, though all are helpful for readers as a starting point for my argument. Nonviolent mechanics maintain Disney's brand identity. Emphasizing nonviolence in *Lorcana's* victory condition suggests that victory comes through personal development rather than

violence, which is a prominent Disney theme. There is also the matter of Disney characters being violent, especially towards other Disney characters. *Lorcana* addresses this interaction through using terms that minimize violence and differ from other CCGs, for example, fight becomes challenge. Furthermore, if *Lorcana* depicted the same violence as other CCGs, it would not feel like Disney, it would feel like any other card game. The nonviolence creates a different effect and game feel. *Lorcana*, whose sets and cards depict characters from many Disney films and television series, feels like a celebration of Disney. Violent mechanics create a dissonance between the joy of Disney and seeing those characters fight each other. Finally, from a business standpoint, nonviolent mechanics make *Lorcana* stand out from competitors and is an easier sell to parents. Rather than be another violent CCG, *Lorcana's* nonviolent mechanics make it unique, align with Disney's brand identity, and maintain the feeling that Disney movies and television series create in audiences.

The motivation for studying *Lorcana* is that it follows a trend in which a CCG emerges from a popular franchise and must adhere to the personality and culture of its source. Examples of an existing franchise creating a CCG include *Hearthstone*,² an offshoot of the *World of Warcraft* universe, *Pokémon Trading Card Game*³ is a physical version of the digital games, and *Legends of Runeterra*⁴, a CCG that uses characters from the multiplayer online battle arena, *League of Legends*. *Lorcana* uses characters, locations, songs, actions, and items from beloved Disney animated movies and television series. Regarding the practice of studying Disney, Janet Wasko argues, "Many feel that the Disney company is somehow unique and different from other corporations, and its products are seen as innocent and pleasurable...Nevertheless, it is important to consider the Disney phenomenon seriously and to insist that it is a legitimate focal point for cultural and social analysis."⁵ Disney invites analysis, especially *Lorcana* because it is unique as the only Disney CCG.⁶ Wasko encourages, "It is appropriate not only to look more closely at the Disney company and its products but also to critique their role in our culture."⁷ As such, this article is interested in *Lorcana's* role in our culture as a Disney CCG. Disney stories depict great struggles, "the main characters must confront various antagonists or problems to reach the goal,"⁸ but primarily readers may think of Disney as princess stories that "have almost always revolved around a love story, in one way or another, and many rely heavily on music."⁹ Even with the diversity of narratives that Disney properties offer, it is uncommon to consider Disney as violent as *World of Warcraft*, *League of Legends*, or *Pokémon*. Therefore, *Lorcana*, as a CCG that minimizes violence in its mechanics, is worth analyzing as a Disney product, and also functions as a CCG that subverts player expectations.

Because Disney's brand identity must be maintained, it would not be appropriate for *Lorcana* to have a victory condition that is the same as other CCGs. When it comes to Disney's brand identity, what I mean is simple. The term brand refers to "stimulus in the mind of the consumer that should create trust."¹⁰ And when it comes to the characteristics of Disney's brand, they are "values relating to goodness, kindness, and innocence for children."¹¹ These qualities: "goodness, kindness, and innocence for children" create the need for *Lorcana* to avoid the level of violence that is typical in

² *Hearthstone* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014).

³ Tsunekazu Ishihara, Kouichi Ooyama, Takumi Akabane, *Pokémon Trading Card Game* (The Pokémon Company, 1995).

⁴ *Legends of Runeterra* (Riot Games, 2020).

⁵ Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 31-32.

⁶ Another Disney card game, *Disney Villainous*, exists, but it is not a CCG like *Lorcana*.

⁷ Wasko, *Understanding*, 32-33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁰ Leonard Berry, "Cultivating Service Brand Equity," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 28 (2000): 128-137.

¹¹ Susan Brockus, "Where Magic Lives: Disney's Cultivation, Co-Creation, and Control of America's Cultural Objects," *Popular Communication* 2, no. 4 (November 2004): 191-211, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15405710pc0204_1.

CCGs. I do not refer to the economic brand,¹² nor the “immense nostalgia machine.”¹³ Henry Giroux argues that “Disney's power lies, in part, in its ability to tap into the lost hopes, abortive dreams, and utopian potential of popular culture.”¹⁴ While this statement applies more to the parks and films side of Disney, *Lorcana* is built upon the same foundation of characters and narratives.

I will address the naysayer at this point in my argument: there is still combat in *Lorcana*. Characters challenge characters and are banished to the discard pile when defeated. My argument is not that there is no violence in *Lorcana*, but that violence not being the path to victory places more emphasis on the nonviolent mechanic of questing for lore. There are characters with abilities that reward lore when challenging and banishing however, a player cannot only attack and hope to win. *Lorcana* changes the language of CCGs to avoid terms like attack, destroy, or kill, and analysis of this language takes place later. But without a health total to eliminate through combat, the overly aggressive player that focuses solely on challenging will not win a game of *Lorcana*. I must also add that *Lorcana* is not unique as the only CCG with a nonviolent victory condition. Another is *Keyforge*, a game which tasks players with managing resources to forge three keys to achieve victory. In *Keyforge* there is combat, creatures die, but victory is not achieved through violence. *Lorcana* remains salient because of its connection to Disney while sharing mechanical similarities with other CCGs.

Placing *Lorcana* in Game Studies

The discussion surrounding violence in games is ongoing in game studies. Situating my argument within the context of this ongoing discussion helps establish the climate into which Disney released *Lorcana* and what its nonviolent victory condition means. Trammel and Waldron present the argument that “it should come as no surprise that violence is so frequently reproduced in games, because violence has always sold when prominently featured in radio, television, film, and art.”¹⁵ We take their words to mean that violence as a victory condition is ubiquitous because it permeates many other media. Players immediately understand that in order to win, an opponent must be utterly and entirely defeated. Regarding violence, Wieslander presents a finding from the live-action role-playing (LARP) community, stating, “it seems like the first genre of larp, just as the first genre of tabletop role-playing, was the typical hack ‘n’ slash in which the only methods needed would be those that simulate violence.”¹⁶ Here, Wieslander notes that violence permeated both the tabletop RPG and larp genre since the beginning. The ubiquity of violence in games establishes the climate into which *Lorcana* was released, and suggests why its nonviolent win condition is salient and worth analyzing.

D&D Combat

In an essay unpacking the prominence of violence in *Dungeons & Dragons* (hereafter *D&D*), Evan Torner highlights many aspects of combat that pertain to my argument regarding violence. Combat is one of *D&D*'s three pillars of adventure, which makes combat mechanics incredibly important. Torner argues that “the best choices for a player during character creation and beyond would be

¹² Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (Pluto Press, 1999).

¹³ Susan Willis, *Inside the Mouse Work and Play at Disney World* (Duke University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Henry Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared Disney and the End of Innocence* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

¹⁵ Aaron Trammel and Emma Leigh Waldron, “Playing for Intimacy: Love, Lust, and Desire in the Pursuit of Embodied Design,” in *Rated M for Mature Sex and Sexuality in Video Games*, edited by Matthew Wysocki and Evan W. Lauteria (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 177-193.

¹⁶ Eliot Wieslander, “Rules of Engagement,” in *Beyond Role and Play*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros (Helsinki: Roepcon, 2004), 181-186.

those that let them hit in combat as often as possible for as much damage as possible."¹⁷ This comment emphasizes the prominence of combat being on player's minds right from the start with creating their characters. Players may view combat as *D&D's* win condition and build their character to accomplish only that task when in truth the other two pillars of adventure, social interaction and exploration add just as much depth and breadth to *D&D* gameplay. Torner also brings up an interesting concept related to violence in how players kill opponents: "when a monster is reduced to zero hit points, it is removed from the fight; it is ambiguously 'dead.'"¹⁸ Death in *D&D* doesn't mean anything. The monsters are fictitious and never existed. Similarly, in CCGs when cards are destroyed or sent to the graveyard, nothing happens to them other than they are moved to a different region of the play space. The cards are usable in future games the same way that an adventuring party will surely encounter another goblin or kobold. Finally, Torner addresses how combat permeates *D&D* rules, stating, "In its design, *D&D* combat translates the fantastical into the mechanical and tactical."¹⁹ Here, Torner expresses how every detail in the game becomes about survival and defeat. Torner argues that *D&D* casts all beings "even gods...as potential participants in a fight."²⁰ This is certainly true of CCGs as well because the games assign health pools and damage values to creatures and players which all foster the play style that to win means to reduce hit points to zero. The overemphasis on combat in *D&D* is akin to victory through violence in CCGs; it is ubiquitous and expected.

Rules of Affection

Many game studies scholars note the absence of well developed rules involving affection in games. Trammell and Waldron raise the question: "why do game mechanics focus specifically on the simulation of violent and misogynistic conflict, in particular?"²¹ They then paraphrase Wieslander and ask the follow up question, "why do we produce games in which our avatars are far more likely to experience violence and even death than love and physical intimacy?"²² Rules for violence are thorough and cover many aspects of combat. Wieslander seeks to answer these questions with examples of how larp injects rules regarding amorous situations. From this, readers see that larp is undergoing a shift towards nonviolent mechanics in a similar way as *Lorcana* is in CCGs. Lindsay Grace, in a 2015 Game Developers Conference talk, discusses the emergence of affection games. From a mechanics standpoint, Grace notes over five hundred games that ask players to "flirt, hug, kiss, or make love as their primary game goal. Affection in these games is the main action."²³ Grace's findings are important for my argument because it shows that a player base exists for games that are not focused on violence. In a book chapter, Grace notes that "affection games represent a divergence from the simulation era of games to one that is more squarely focused on affection as a solution."²⁴ Affection games show that nonviolent mechanics are of interest to players; they want more than to kill opponents in combat. They desire a different challenge. None of *Lorcana's* mechanics are directly connected to affection, although the divergence away from violence has reached CCGs with *Lorcana* offering players a nonviolent victory condition.

¹⁷ Evan Torner, "Combat in Dungeons & Dragons," *Rascal*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.rascal.news/combat-dnd-fifty-years-dungeons-dragons-evan-torner-excerpt-mit-press/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Trammell and Waldron, "Playing for Intimacy."

²² Ibid.

²³ Lindsay Grace, "Digital Affection Games: Cultural Lens and Critical Reflection," in *Social, Casual and Mobile Games: The Changing Gaming Landscape*, edited by Tama Leaver and Michele Willson (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 89-104.

²⁴ Ibid.

Attitudes towards Disney

In addition to the discussions regarding violence, combat, and the lack of rules for amorous role-play, my argument touches on the ongoing discussion about Disney's cultural and corporate impact. In the *International Journal of Disney Studies*, scholars publish articles about conservative cultural criticism in the 1990s,²⁵ they criticize Disney's live-actions princess movies,²⁶ and finally they note the shifting climate of LGBTQ+ representation in Disney media.²⁷ Ongoing scholarship is supported by foundational texts like Giroux's *The Mouse That Roared Disney and the End of Innocence*. In this text, Giroux puts forth his primary argument: "The organization and regulation of culture by large corporations such as Disney profoundly influence children's culture and their everyday lives."²⁸ The influence of children is an important consideration in the discussion of *Lorcana* because many players will come to the game with fond memories or nostalgic feelings towards the characters and source material. This affects how they view what the game does. Giroux warns of this, stating, "recognition of the pleasure that Disney provides should not blind us to the realization that Disney is about more than entertainment."²⁹ Giroux warns audiences to keep their eyes open and be aware of the scope of Disney's reach and influence. Succinctly they write, "while Disney films do not promote the violence that has become central to many other forms of popular and mass culture, they do carry cultural and social messages that need to be scrutinized."³⁰ I scrutinize *Lorcana* to unpack the cultural and social messages that it carries in its mechanics, and add my findings to the ongoing discussions in game studies and Disney studies.

CCG Victory

Since the inception of the genre, which began with *Magic: The Gathering* (hereafter *MTG*) in 1993, CCGs have perpetuated the victory condition that an opponent must lose all of their health points to be eliminated from the game. The tradition for the violent elimination of an opponent's health points stems from the fact that board and card games are rooted in the wargaming tradition, a hobby which simulated historic battles using terrain maps, miniatures, and dice.³¹ Johansson, describes the framing in which CCGs operate, "From a fantasy perspective, the players are commanders, sending in their troops to fight down the enemies and in the end one of them will be defeated."³² Regardless of who or what the players embody—a Planeswalker (*MTG*), a rival trainer (*Pokémon*), a rival tamer (*Digimon*), or a duelist (*Yu-Gi-Oh!*)—there is a health pool that must be drained to establish a winner. In *MTG*, *Hearthstone*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, and *Legends of Runeterra* each player begins with a set amount of health points however, some other CCGs use alternative health points. In *Digimon*, each player begins the game with five cards facedown, called security cards. As *Digimon* attack, the security cards are eliminated. Once all five security cards are gone and the player attacks one final time, the player wins the game. *Pokémon* is similar. Each player begins with six prize cards.

²⁵ Alex Pinelli, "Conservatives Watch Cartoons: The Rise of Disney, the Right and Cultural Criticism in the 1990s," *International Journal of Disney Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2025): 15-31.

²⁶ Caroline Yiqian Wang, 2025. "Re-Imaging Empowered Princesshood against the Rise of the Fourth-Wave Feminism: A Thematic Study of Disney's Princess Live-Action Remakes," *International Journal of Disney Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2025): 33-51.

²⁷ Matt Weaver, "'We're Not Quite There Yet...But We Will Be': Identifying Shifts in the Walt Disney Company's LGBTQ+ Representation," *International Journal of Disney Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2025): 53-70.

²⁸ Giroux, 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

³¹ Ian Livingstone and James Wallis, *Board Games in 100 Moves* (DK Publishing, 2019).

³² Stefan J. Johansson, "What Makes Collectible Card Games Fun to Play?," *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009 Conference: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*, January 1, 2009, <https://dl.digra.org/index.php/dl/article/view/403>.

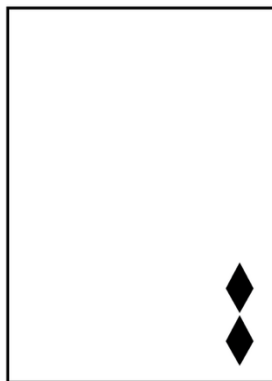
Defeating a player's Pokémon awards them prize cards and the first player to claim all six of their prize cards wins. Even though the specifics differ amongst the various games, the end result is the same: violence leads to victory. Attacking either creatures or a health pool maintains the violent trend in CCGs. It is because of this violent trend that causes *Lorcana's* contrast to be that much more evident in its mechanics and gameplay. *Lorcana* does not reward violence the same way as the aforementioned CCGs.

Lore + Questing

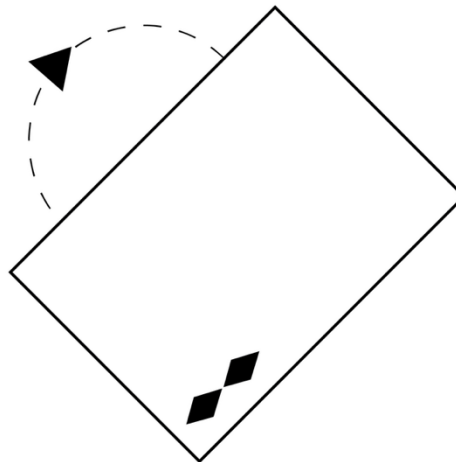
Disney's *Lorcana* differs greatly in the degree of confrontation and violence of other CCGs, while also introducing a victory condition that requires no interaction with the opponent. No interaction means that a player could summon characters, use the characters to quest for lore, and win. Players do not win by defeating opposing characters, attacking health, or eliminating the opposing player's deck. *Lorcana* functions more like a race than a battle.

Questing in Disney's *Lorcana*

A ready character that was played the previous turn can quest for lore.



The player exerts the card, turning it sideways.



Once exerted, the amount of lore shown on the card is scored. Two, in this example.

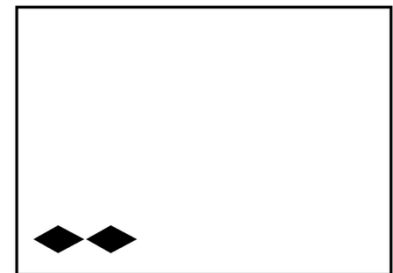


Figure 2: Questing in Disney's *Lorcana*. Illustration by author.

In *Lorcana*, a player wins by reaching twenty lore, and they accumulate lore through questing with their characters. The rules explain that "you race across *Lorcana* to find and collect missing pieces of lore...Your goal is to be the first player to gain twenty or more lore. Some card abilities give you lore, but the most common way to gain it is by playing characters and sending them on quests."³³ To send characters on quests, players 'exert' them, which means to rotate the card ninety degrees to the side, like tapping in *MTG*. When this happens, players score however much lore is indicated on

³³ "Quickstart Rules," *Disney's Lorcana* (Ravensburger, 2023).

the character card. Questing is a nonviolent game action that players take to win and is evidence of Disney's brand identity of "goodness, kindness, and innocence for children."

The game's co-designer, Ryan Miller, in an interview with *The Gamer*, discusses how questing achieves the desired "confrontation level" that makes the game access to new players and younger gamers, "you actually don't win this game by confronting your opponent...confrontation is an important part of a trading card game because you need some ability to interact with what your opponent is doing, but you don't win the game that way."³⁴ Miller describes that confrontation, or violence, in *Lorcana* is not the path to victory, it's about slowing down your opponent's victory. Banishing opposing characters means that an opponent cannot collect as much lore, instead they need to play more characters first. Miller continues, "Rather than battle your opponent's Pokémon or whittling their life points down to zero, winning a game of *Lorcana* requires you to collect twenty points (called lore) before your opponent. That's an important distinction, not only mechanically but emotionally. It lightens the mood a bit."³⁵ Lore creates a different feeling than health points because lore isn't attached to one player or the other. There is an infinite amount of lore to be found. Collecting lore does not remove possible lore for an opponent to collect lore as well, and collecting lore does not come at the cost of an opponent's already collected lore. As we noted earlier, it's a race.

What exactly is the lore that must be collected to win? The game's website explains lore as "a treasure that must be preserved and protected at all costs,"³⁶ although the Oxford Languages definition adds more insights, "a body of traditions and knowledge on a subject or held by a particular group, typically passed from person to person by word of mouth."³⁷ The game's nebulous definition of lore doesn't provide players an understanding about what the struggle to achieve, but the Oxford Languages definition provides an interesting context for what *Lorcana*'s about. Rather than defeat an opponent through violence means, the collection of lore means the game is about the collection and preservation of "traditions and knowledge," likely about Disney franchises, meaning that *Lorcana* is about a fight to preserve culture, identity, and tradition. Rather than eliminate an opponent's lore, *Lorcana* wants players to succeed in accumulating lore to ensure its longevity. Both players begin the game with zero lore and count upwards to twenty as they quest. Imagine if the mechanics were to steal, destroy, or obscure another player's lore. Rather than be a journey of collection, *Lorcana* would be a crusade to overtake the "traditions and knowledge" of the opposing player. Violence would return as the core gameplay mechanic and *Lorcana* would be just like very other CCG on the market. Instead, lore and questing to collect it, match incredibly well with Disney's brand and is in the CCG genre as a nonviolent victory condition.

Willpower

There are two additional mechanics in *Lorcana* in which a change in the language reveals efforts to maintain Disney's brand identity. The first is willpower. In CCGs, creature cards have numbers that indicate attack and defence values, though depending on the game they are different. In *MTG*, creatures have power and toughness. In *Hearthstone* minions have attack and health. In *Lorcana* characters have strength and willpower. Willpower relates to nonviolence because it is not a typical synonym of health that CCGs use. Toughness implies a physical resistance, vitality, or constitution.

³⁴ "How Disney *Lorcana* Co-Designer Ryan Miller Helped Create a Card Game Unlike Any Other," *The Gamer*, 2023, <https://www.thegamer.com/disney-lorcana-ryan-miller-interview-launch-gen-con/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "The First Chapter: The Story Begins," *Disney Lorcana*, 2023, <https://www.disneylorcana.com/en-US/story/magic>.

³⁷ "Lore," *Oxford Languages Dictionary*.

Willpower however, relates more to a spirit or mental fortitude. Gregg spoke about the power of will in nonviolent situations, asking, "Does the peaceful resister have the 'will to conquer.'"³⁸ The "will to conquer" is explained as "the first condition of victory."³⁹ Gregg then answers his own question, "He surely does. Indeed, he must have an indomitable will to victory in order to endure the suffering put upon him."⁴⁰ What this means is that willpower as a label for how much damage a character can take before being banished appropriately fits the nonviolent alignment to Disney's standards. The "will to conquer" or willpower indicates the amount of suffering a nonviolent resistor can endure. The phrase "indomitable will to victory" perfectly describes how victory is achieved in *Lorcana* because it is only when characters are exerted that they can be challenged by opposing characters. High enough willpower means that characters survive the challenge and continue questing to gain victory.

Strength and Willpower in *Disney's Lorcana*

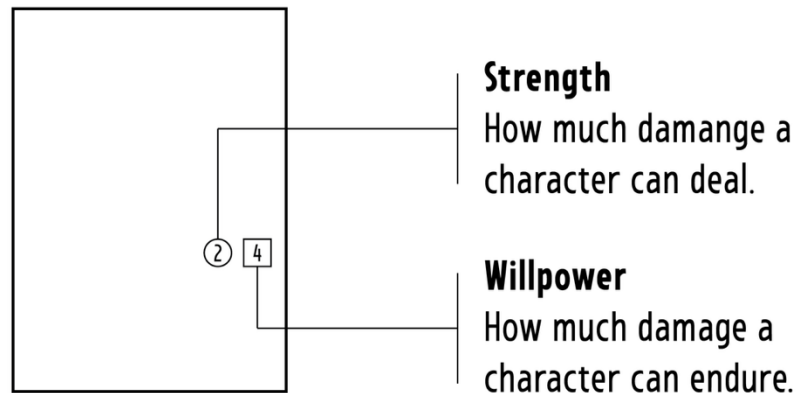


Figure 3: Strength and Willpower in *Disney's Lorcana*. Illustration by author.

Labeling health as willpower is appropriate for the nonviolent method of victory in *Lorcana*. Characters do not have health and die, they have willpower and continue questing as long as their willpower remains. Once their willpower is used up, they are banished. If willpower had been labeled as a synonym of health, it would have promoted the typical violent themes of CCGs, and perpetuated what Gregg describes as, "Your violent opponent wants you to fight in the way to which he is accustomed. If you utterly decline, and adopt a method wholly new to him, you have thus gained an immediate tactical advantage."⁴¹ By shifting the language about attack and health in a CCG, players must rethink what it means. Because this is a Disney product, *Lorcana* is right to alter language and create differences for players to notice.

³⁸ Richard Bartlett Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*, edited by and James Tully (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 104.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 102.

Challenging

With willpower in mind, I will unpack how *Lorcana's* combat system (termed “challenging”) perpetuates the problem of violence in games. Challenging is possible when a non-exerted character exerts⁴² and chooses an opposing exerted character as the target of the challenge. In context, characters who have either quested or challenged the previous turn are targets for a challenge. When in a challenge, damage happens simultaneously. The strength and willpower of each character is compared. Any characters whose willpower is less than the challenging character’s strength are banished. Banished cards are placed in the discard pile.

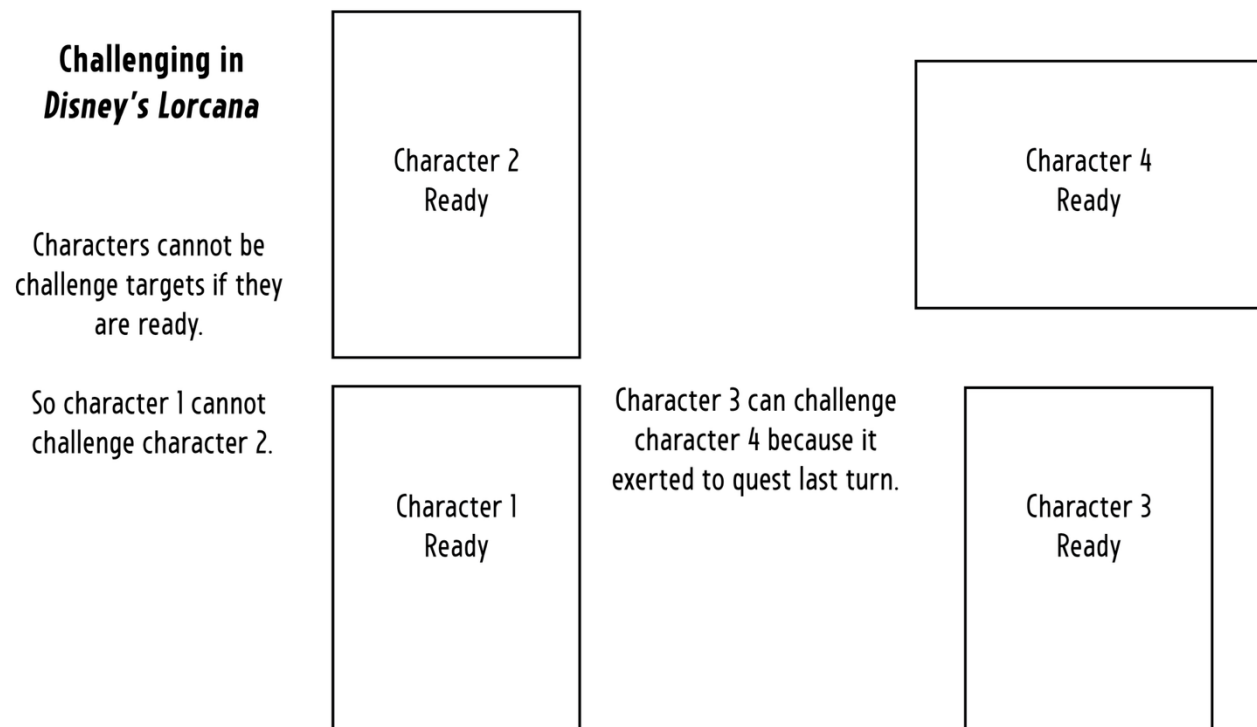


Figure 4: Challenging in *Disney's Lorcana*. Illustration by author.

Just from the basic rules explanation there is a lot to unpack. First, challenging instead of any other combat synonyms reveals interesting insights into how *Lorcana* maintains Disney’s brand. Disney characters don’t fight—they challenge. This language minimizes the violence. In truth, damage is still dealt during challenges. Damage remains on characters until they are healed or banished. Damage, though, does still fit within the nonviolent ideology, for as Martin Green notes, “Suffering is the badge of the human race.”⁴³ For this reason, damage is a fitting term within nonviolence. I won’t go so far as to say the violence is sugar coated, but the shift in *Lorcana's* language alters the perception of combat in the game.

⁴² “Exerting” is *Lorcana's* equivalent of “tapping” in *Magic*. Characters can generally exert themselves once every turn and player as a rule ready all of their exerted characters at the beginning of their turn.

⁴³ Martin Green, “The Origins of Non-Violence: Tolstoy and Gandhi in Their Historical Settings,” *mkgandhi.org*, 23, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/origins-of-nonviolence.pdf>.

Banish is another great example of how the shift in language matches Disney's brand. There is no death in *Lorcana*. Characters are not killed. They are not destroyed. They are not eliminated. They are not defeated. They are banished, which implies a change in a physical state—of going somewhere else—rather than typical CCG terms that recode death. Banish aligns with the game's narrative in that players call forth their characters from another realm. When they are banished, they return to their home realm. Understanding banish in this way removes all the connections to death. Characters simply lose the challenge and return home. Therefore, challenging and banishing matches Disney's brand and stays away from violent connotations because the language around combat is changed.

Another interesting outcome of challenging is that rather than defeat the opponent through combat, it merely slows them down and often results in both players losing characters. As has been established, players win when they reach twenty lore and in order to quest characters must exert which allows them to be challenged. A common tactic is for one player to challenge characters, banishing them, so that the player must summon new characters before continuing to quest. Questing for lore can snowball really quickly with more than ten lore gained a turn depending on a player's board. Challenging allows players to remove high lore characters and slow the progress towards victory. This often results in both players losing characters. In violent encounters, both sides often lose participants, not to mention innocents being lost in the crossfire. The outcome of both players losing characters demonstrates how *Lorcana* plays out when violence is the priority. Both sides suffer casualties and the real goal remains out of grasp. Even in cases where lore is achieved by banishing characters, because damage remains on characters, insufficient lore is gained before the character, too, is banished—questing, not challenging, is the most effective method of victory. Thus, challenging, as the most violent aspect of *Lorcana*, has its pros and cons, but is successful because of the language used—challenge and banish—and that an aggressive play style does not advance towards the victory condition. In these ways *Lorcana* subverts the typical CCG experience, and matches Disney's brand identity.

Discussion

Are readers to take *Lorcana* at face value and believe that its nonviolent victory condition upholds Disney's brand identity or is there something else going on? Lee Artz argues that Disney sends mixed messages in its media. The films portray narratives of good triumphing over evil, but, Artz states, "herein lies Disney's message to the world: 'Get whatever you can by force, deceit, or luck. The future of the world revolves around the individual, self-interested actions of naturally-superior elites.'"⁴⁴ That does not sound like the "goodness, kindness, and innocence for children" brand identity that we mentioned in the introduction. Despite *Lorcana* upholding Disney's brand identity, I have to agree with Artz and echo that *Lorcana* sends a mixed message. There is "goodness, kindness, and innocence for children" to be found in *Lorcana*, but changing the names of mechanics does not remove the fact that there is violence in *Lorcana*. Disney characters are assigned strength and health values. They die and are sent to a graveyard when their health is eliminated. In essence, *Lorcana* is the same as any CCG that pits players against each other and offers combat mechanics. *Lorcana* does not do anything different with its mechanics. There are no attempts to diversify play like Trammel and Waldron⁴⁵ and Wieslander note. Instead of creating new mechanics, *Lorcana's*

⁴⁴ Lee Artz, "Animating Hierarchy: Disney and the Globalization of Capitalism," *Global Media Journal* (2002), <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/animating-hierarchy-disney-and-the-globalization-of-capitalism.php?aid=35055>.

⁴⁵ Trammel and Waldron, "Playing for Intimacy."

terminology adjustment simply masks the violence that is still present, which suggests a failing to diverge from the ubiquity of violence in RPGs.⁴⁶ The only thing that remains different from the majority of CCGs is that a player cannot win solely through combat; questing and the accumulation of lore is the only way to win a *Lorcana* match.

Continuing this thread of violence being present in *Lorcana*, I want to mention that the primary way of dealing damage outside of combat is with songs. Songs function like spells in *MTG*. Songs play an interesting role in *Lorcana*'s violence because they damage to one or more characters. Songs are titled as direct quotes from songs. "And Then Along Came Zeus" deals five damage to chosen character or location. "Let The Storm Rage On" deals two damage to chosen character. I find songs to be an interesting mechanic because Disney music is often thought of as "wholesome vehicles of amusement, a highly regarded source of fun and joy for children."⁴⁷ However, in *Lorcana*, songs are another violent means of removing opposing characters and shows where the cracks in Disney's brand identity are evident.

Lorcana is a product like everything else that Disney offers. Giroux argues that Disney "sells not only its products but also values, images, and identities that are largely aimed at teaching young people to be consumers."⁴⁸ Giroux's statement suggests that everything Disney puts out can be seen as an advertisement for Disney to begin or continue the cycle of consumerism. Trammell and Waldron agree, stating, "commercial video games are tools of control and coercion, designed to model things that sell, not things that might contribute toward a social good."⁴⁹ Artz shares the same sentiment and states that Disney champions "consumerist values and ideologies supportive of capitalist globalization."⁵⁰ *Lorcana* is unable to separate itself from the capitalist machine. As a Disney product, *Lorcana* makes its players into consumers. As they play the game, players are exposed to new cards and strategies, meaning more cards must be purchased to keep up. The carrot always dangles in front of players as they are led into a lifestyle of consumerism. As a product to consume, new *Lorcana* sets release every three months, which can put a strain on player's wallets or players find it difficult to keep up with new characters, mechanics, and a shifting meta.⁵¹ Thus, as a product to consume, *Lorcana* is seen as just another offering intended to amass a faithful following on Disney's treadmill of media releases.

Finally, a connection between *Lorcana* mechanics and Disney is how resources are treated in the game and the company. *Lorcana*'s resource used to play cards is called ink. Ink is gained by playing inkable cards (they have a specific symbol on them) facedown into one's inkwell. Unlike *MTG* that has specific land cards that provide mana or *Hearthstone* with its mana crystals that increased and refilled each turn, *Lorcana* forces players to consider which usable cards (characters, songs, locations, items) to convert to ink. Players may ink a character then never be able to play that character for the entire game. *Lorcana*'s ink mechanic asks players to constantly consider and manage the balance between committing to inking resourcing and keeping resources in hand to play, quest, and win. Ink is salient in this discussion because as a mechanic it aligns with Disney's treatment of staff and creators. By treatment, I mean using them up as a resource to gain as much

46 Torner, "Combat in *Dungeons & Dragons*."

47 Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared*.

48 Ibid.

49 Trammel and Waldron, "Playing for Intimacy."

50 Lee, "Animating Hierarchy."

51 Thin_Nothing, "Sets to Fast," *Reddit*, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/Lorcana/comments/18i1jtl/sets_to_fast/.

benefit before casting them aside. Evidence of this comes from Disney park employees,^{52,53} animators,⁵⁴ and analysis of Disney's online presence.⁵⁵ Also worth noting is an entire book about the difficulty of forming a union at Disney.⁵⁶ These examples demonstrate that Disney does to its employees what it asks of *Lorcana* players—to focus on gains and advancement rather than the wellbeing of staff (I use staff to refer to the cards in a player's deck). Therefore, even a nonviolent mechanic like ink has nefarious implications through how it relates to Disney's treatment of its employees.



Figure 5: A sample setup playing *Lorcana*. Photo by author.

⁵² Regan Morris, "Disneyland Workers Say They Live in Cars and Motels Due to Low Pay," BBC, July 20, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv2gpx7pnwdo>.

⁵³ Vanita Salisbury, "Analysis Finds Disney World Employees Are Often Subject to Violence from Visitors, Including Spitting and Scratching," *Business & Human Rights Resource Centre*, 2019, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/analysis-finds-disney-world-employees-are-often-subject-to-violence-from-visitors-including-spitting-and-scratching-includes-comments-from-disney/>.

⁵⁴ Jim Korkis, "In His Own Words: Ward Kimball Tells Some Disney Stories," *Cartoon Research*, 2014, <https://cartoonresearch.com/index.php/in-his-own-words-ward-kimball-tells-some-disney-stories/>.

⁵⁵ Brian Martin and Brian Yecies. "Disney through the Web Looking Glass," *First Monday*, 2004, <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1153/1073>.

⁵⁶ Mike Schneider, *Mickey and the Teamsters: A Fight for Fair Unions at Disney* (University Press of Florida, 2023).

Conclusion

This article demonstrated the nonviolent victory condition of questing to achieve twenty lore in *Disney's Lorcana* subverts typical CCG conventions, player expectations, and maintains alignment with Disney's brand identity. *Lorcana* provides players a victory condition that does not require violence like other CCGs. This choice demonstrates how "goodness, kindness, and innocence," aspects of Disney's brand identity, are found within *Lorcana's* game mechanics. Through its use of nonviolence, *Lorcana* diverges from CCGs that require eliminating an opponent's health, which is partly the reason why *Lorcana* is worth analyzing. The unique mechanics of questing to obtain lore, the willpower of characters, and challenging demonstrate how typical CCG terms have been deescalated through the language assigned to them to imply a reduced level of harm when it comes to character interactions.

As a conclusory review, it is important that *Lorcana* aims to emphasize nonviolence in its mechanics for many reasons—some of which I have discussed, others I think are important but are not fully unpacked in this article. I argued that *Lorcana's* nonviolent mechanics maintain Disney's brand identity. The nonviolent mechanics also prevent the depiction of violence between Disney characters, and does this through gameplay terms that differ from other CCGs. It is also important that *Lorcana* emphasizes nonviolence because it functions as a celebration of Disney's history because its card library contains characters, locations, actions, and songs from many Disney films and television series. Bringing all these aspects together and making them fight does not feel like Disney. Finally, a nonviolent CCG stands out from competitors and is a better sell to parents. These reasons highlight why it is important for *Lorcana* to emphasize nonviolence in its mechanics.

As final thoughts, I raised points that despite the language changes around combat, nothing in *Lorcana* changes on a mechanical level; characters fight and die. I brought up the point that songs, a familiar aspect of Disney media are used to deal damage to characters. Additionally, *Lorcana* can be seen as yet another Disney product that encourages players to participate in the treadmill of consumerism. Finally, *Lorcana's* mana resource system, can be seen in similar ways to how Disney treats its employees and creators—expendable resources to foster the growth and production of business.

Overall, *Lorcana* demonstrates how nonviolence is more palatable to Disney fans. *Lorcana* contains interesting and unique design and gameplay perspectives that provide new design space for CCGs to pursue—meaning that by iterating on *Lorcana's* victory conditions, other CCGs can adapt or develop fresh mechanics to bring their players to victory. *Lorcana's* nonviolent mechanics uphold Disney's brand identity at first glance, but ultimately buckle under scrutiny, leaving players enveloped in the "contradictions in the way adults experience a Disney culture that combines pleasure and irritation."⁵⁷



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⁵⁷ Giroux, 8.

began when he picked up *Diablo 2* as a teenager. His last name is on the Stanley Cup. He designs card games and writes comic books.