



What is the Empire of Ys?

Ys is a city on a ringworld. Although it has well-defined districts, they magically shift and change occasionally. It used to be a human-ruled Empire which aggressively conquered and colonised other worlds using magical portals (the Dread Portals of the game's title). Recently, Ys was invaded by the undead mega-fiend the Autarch, who now sits uncaring in the imperial palace, occasionally enforcing its will through the Guilds and the Noble Families but otherwise allowing the empire to function as it did before without much interference.

Overall, the setting is a fantasy renaissance setting, where instead of ocean-borne trade the city-state of Ys profits from its business with the worlds it is in contact with through the magical portals. Without the regular edicts of the human Empire and the vague but fearful orders that occasionally come from Autarch, there is much political infighting between the Guilds and their agents. There is a patronage system, and the player characters like everyone else will have a patron who will help them in return for support.

The other worlds are:

- Erubus. A fallen colony world, whose portal is officially closed. A dark world of endless caverns, rich in minerals and metals (which initially drew the Ysians) but inhabited by monsters (which is why they left).
- Marn. A well-established colony, the source of much of Ys's food, controlled by playing off rival Kingdoms against each other.
- Nespo. At first contact a dead desert world full of ancient ruins rich with treasure. This is the world the undead Autarch came from.
- Samara. Another colony world dominated by two factions, The Empire of the Lion and the Three Kingdoms.
- Tethys. An ocean world dotted with islands.

There is a system of Guilds that run various functions of the Empire.

- The Guild of the Arcane. Ys powerful magician's organisation, that monitors and creates the portals between worlds.
- The Army. The iron fist of the Empire, which enforces its will in the colonies.
- The Temples of the Six. This guild runs the State Religion that worships a group of Six Deities.
- The Guilds of Headsman. Quite literally a guild of Assassins.
- The Guild of Crafters. A humble, and somewhat overlooked Guild, which wields great power due to the size of its membership.
- The League of Explorers, who mount expeditions through the portals to the other worlds. All the player characters are members of this organisation by default and another.
- The Black Rose. A merchants' league in favour with the Agents of the Autarch.
- The Steel Hand. An organisation of thugs, enforcers, bodyguards, and general henchmen.
- The Emerald Hand. Once a diplomatic and spy service, now stripped of its powers by the Autarch it appears a motley crew of knowledge-hungry scholars and performers.
- The Five Noble Families:
 - The Acarni. As their name suggests, they consider themselves to have a monopoly on magical matters. They are decadent powermongers who pretty much run the Guild of the Arcane.
 - The Lantari. Followers of the Goddess of Love and War they are practical and militaristic. They have a close association with the Army.
 - The Solari. Some say they are a house in deep decline after the banishment of their patron goddess Solaria (or Dawn) by the Autarch. Others say they are just plotting in the shadows.
 - The Telani. A rich house of merchants who prosper through the activities of the Black Rose.
 - The Valerii. Sinister and Machiavellian, they openly back the Autarch.