

Fantasy Setting Proposal: “Empire of Glass”

Core Ethos Sentence: Empire of Glass is a crumbling world where kingdoms, magic and even the gods are unpredictable and unreliable.

Who are the heroes? The heroes are exiled royalty, once-powerful mages, priests left orphaned by their dead and dying gods, swift-riding barbarians, scheming opportunists, and, above all, the crafty, grey-eyed Children of the Fey.

What do they do? Some heroes hope to renew the glory of their own kingdoms or even the Empire itself. Others struggle to rediscover their lost faiths, snatched away by the fall of the gods. Still others seek to profit from the breakdown of civilization by reshaping cities, governments and religions to their advantage. Many scholars, wizards and even barbarians strive to uncover the cause of the steady death of the land, but some suspect that this knowledge will only bring more death. The Fey whisper that the Empire’s decay stems from a taint at its heart, and the greatest heroes live to burn away this ancient evil wherever it appears.

Threats, Conflicts and Villains: Although the Empire is dying, many of its kingdoms survive and quarrel with each other or with the barbarian tribes. The priests are also quarreling: two religious sects, one ancient and one newly arisen, vie for the exclusive right to worship the Empire’s surviving god, while new powers struggle in the border lands. The greatest and subtlest threat, however, is the darkness that has mortally wounded the Empire, and now seems to be seeping into the barbarian lands. Even the earth itself is affected, and is slowly turning into desert. Rumour suggests that the dead areas of land are crumbling away, leaving nothing but void in their wake.

Nature of Magic: While the Empire flourished, magic was everywhere – some say the very building-stones were full of magic. However, now that the buildings have fallen and the gods are dead, magic itself seems to be dying. There are pockets throughout the empire where magic, both arcane and divine, is useless and even magical weapons become impotent. In other areas, magic is unstable, often resulting in unpredictable effects. There are a few kingdoms in the Empire that remain mysteriously untouched by this magical deterioration. In general, however, while the still-thriving barbarian gods grant their servants great spells, and no one knows the limits of the Fey, wizards and clerics must hunt for every scrap of lore and faith.

What’s new? What’s different? Empire of Glass provides players with a world that is unpredictable, unstable, and, at times, uncomfortable. The tottering cities, unpredictable magic and fallen religions represent a departure from standard fantasy role-playing by removing the “safety nets” of magnificent kings, powerful spells and omnipotent deities that many gamers take for granted. The fact that even the earth underneath the players’ feet is not always a given heightens this uncertainty, while the threat of some dark taint makes any encounter more frightening. Finally, the decay and downfall of the Empire offers players not only the opportunity to participate in traditional adventuring within the setting, but also gives them the less-conventional chance to shape and rebuild the world itself, thus encouraging an increased degree of player “ownership” of the world.

Entrants: Ursula Witcher and Elizabeth Tsai