

for EABA™

# Ythrek™

honor, family and survival...

 **BTRC**

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# WHERE DO I FIND IT?

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# INTRODUCTION

In the last days, the Ancients grew proud and claimed unto themselves those powers reserved to the gods. And the spirits were wrath, and sought to wreak vengeance upon the lands of Men. But the gods stayed the hand of their servants, saying "Men shall have what they desire, and it shall be punishment enough." And it was so, for while the gods were born to power and knew its perils, the Ancients were but men who thought themselves gods. And their doom came upon them so swiftly that they had not even the time to realize themselves foolish.

Book of Endings and Beginnings , 1:1

▼ **INTRODUCTION** -The world of Ythrek is one of new powers and ancient cataclysms. At one time in the distant past it was composed of a number of powerful empires, all shattered by a disaster or disasters of such magnitude that even the survivors were left unsure of what happened, and thus were only able to record what they called the Cataclysm in fragmentary form. These empires had names, some of which are even remembered by name, but by and large they are just called the Ancients.

No one knows how many perished in the Cataclysm, or even how many Ancients there were. Sages know that no more than one person in one hundred survived, and some claim to show by mathematics that no more than one person in a million survived. The scholarly debate is mostly whether those who perished did so immediately, or in the weeks and months afterward when they starved or otherwise fell because their Ancient magics no longer supported them. Novomad tradition states that the six Families were the only survivors of the Ancient city across the Charmed River, a mound of buried rubble some kilometers across. Some claim that the Ancients perished entirely, and that those who claim the mantle of civilization were little more than their pets. This theory is largely discounted, as the ruins and tools that have been found are all of a scale for human hands and bodies.

The artifacts and knowledge of the Ancients were almost entirely lost in the Cataclysm. What is known is that once freed from the pre-conceptions of generations past, the survivors of the Cataclysm eventually learned to harness the powers within and without themselves. The sages call these powers a harnessing of the "metaphysical vacuum", but most people just call it "magic". It is a tradition that goes back to well before the Cataclysm, though there is some evidence to suggest the Ancients had abandoned these powers for things even more mysterious. The scanty records of the Cataclysm survivors were largely lost, edited or modified to suit the religious or political purposes of subsequent generations, which leaves the present-day inhabitants of Ythrek little solid evidence of what happened to the Ancients, or of how to avert it should that dread circumstance once again threaten to come to pass.

The civilizations of Ythrek rebuilt themselves far from the ruins of the Ancients, it is said because the seas rose and covered them, though those seas have largely receded now, leaving unearthly forests of coral-encrusted towers as mute monuments to lost greatness. Some places of the Ancients were spared the inundations, but suffered earthquakes, looting, fire or pillage, plus the ravages of centuries of weather. And some places were poisoned by Ancient powers gone awry, and remain a danger to the unwary to the present day. Life has been harsh in the many centuries since the Cataclysm, and only in the past century has survival been simple enough that people have dared explore lands outside the immediate safety of their villages or cities. For every square kilometer where men have tread in the past century, there are a hundred that they haven't...

▼ **FOR THE GAMEMASTER** - Ythrek is a not-quite generic fantasy setting, a world you can expand and populate as needed, with a stable cultural center at Novomad, which has enough intrigue of its own to be the focus of many adventures. It shouldn't take a lot of work to unravel or modify the background to suit your fancy. Even Ythrek's history is mutable, with several options to choose from to explain its mysterious past. For the novice game-master it is fairly simple and forgiving, with enough familiar elements to be understandable, yet enough mystery to keep adventurers guessing for a while. It is a world full of normal people, just trying to get by, but also with mages of great power and heroes of superhuman skill. Empires are being built and toppled. Ancient secrets are being unearthed, including those that should have stayed buried. And of course, the full spectrum of human emotions and motivations remains the same as it has ever been, and which is the ultimate fount from which most adventure material springs.

▼ **FOR THE PLAYER** - Ythrek is a place to have fun. To adventure, solve puzzles, research secrets and get into fights on occasion. Well, get into fights fairly often, but only get into *serious* ones on occasion. There are enough people in the world that you can pick and choose your challenges, and the **EABA** system is forgiving enough that you can make some early mistakes and have your adventurer survive to tell the tale. This isn't to say that those mistakes won't come back to haunt you later. The central locale is not big enough to get lost in, and the people you annoy will know where they can find you. That's part of life, and part of adventuring in Ythrek.

▼ **GROUND RULES** - Ythrek has a lot of flexibility, and you of course can twist it around any way you want, but for long-term play it was designed with a number of things in mind.

1. *Over the lifetime of a given adventurer, things are not going to change all that much.* For denizens of the early 21st century it is hard to imagine a time when the tools and technologies available when you were born would be the only ones available by the time you died, yet for most of human history that has been the case. It is also the case in Ythrek. The most advanced places in Ythrek are on a par with the late 17th century on Earth. There are unlikely to be any technological breakthroughs that make life, war or magic significantly different than they are at the start of the campaign. This is not to say that clever or wealthy adventurers can't bypass this for some personal advantage, but by and large such changes will not be financially viable, or will tend to disrupt the social order and be quietly discouraged by those in charge. If a campaign runs through several generations of adventurers, then yes, significant change can be expected.

2. *Environmentally, the world is a very harsh place, and will stay that way.* Without draft animals or heavy machinery, *all* labor is hand labor. Agriculture is a barely sustainable proposition, and then only in limited areas. Vast areas are as desolate as the Andean plateaus where there has been no measurable rainfall in centuries, and the oceans provide little bounty. Communities everywhere in Ythrek are physically limited in size by the tiny amount of arable land available. Within a few generations, Novomad will reach its limit, and either have to engage in large public works to increase their arable land, or begin to suffer from famine. Even now, people in power are working to reap the greatest benefit should either come to pass.

3. *Something very bad looms on the horizon.* Every campaign needs an overall theme, and a threat to the security of Novomad or even the world should be lurking in the background. There are gods, though they are largely silent. There are still the visions of holy men and cryptic prophecies. Trade brings strangers to town, not all of whose motives are charitable. Mages seek adventurers to recover things that have lain hidden for centuries, and remain tight-lipped about exactly "what for", and "why now?".

▼ **THE BOOK OF ENDINGS & BEGINNINGS** - Quotes from this tome head some chapters of **Ythrek**. To adventurers from Novomad, it is a quasi-holy writ. Not associated with any single religion or spirit worship, it is nonetheless revered by all, and its moral and social dictates have shaped the law, or even have the force of law in some cases.

In casual use, it is simply known as the Book, with an emphasis on the capital "B" that is hard to mistake even in verbal use. The Book describes its own origins, a history written by the survivors of the Cataclysm, combined with transcriptions of words passed from on high by various spirits. Each of the Families of Novomad has a patriarch (or matriarch) who supposedly authored a chapter, and the admonishments of that chapter are taken very seriously by the members of that Family. The Book is arranged into chapters, along the following lines:

**Chapter One:** The Ancients, their abilities and society are described in wonderfully vivid but frustratingly vague terms, laced with forebodings of what is to come. *As Spirits they were, commanding the very elements with words and gestures, raising what was low, bringing low what was high, even to cutting through mountains to spare themselves walking around them. And the Spirits looked upon the Ancients with sorrow, for in thinking they knew all, they were thus unready for the unknown.*

**Chapter Two:** The Cataclysm is described in gruesome detail, but detail that centers mainly on describing horrible ways to die rather than exactly who or what was doing the killing. It also extols the wisdom and foresight of the original Families, how they survived the Cataclysm, and a lot of stuff that ends up being the basis for the modern divisions of labor and other Family traits. *And the third demon touched Mardak, and his lungs turned to dust and his eyes to red-hot coals. His windows of diamond and doors of iron protected him not, and so he opened them to flee elsewhere. But the fourth demon was waiting at the threshold, and it touched him, and his bones turned to water, and he died.*

**Chapter Three:** The early life of the Matamoros family after the Cataclysm. Describes most of the clan in glowing if not supernaturally gifted terms, paragons, builders without equal, the only reason people still aren't living in mud huts, and so on. *And Karno watched the stones of the home flow like mud beneath the Hungry Rain. He scooped the mud into his hands and squeezed the rain from it, and it turned back into stone, and the Hungry Rain ate it not. And he capered naked in the Hungry Rain and laughed like a man possessed, for he now knew the Cataclysm would have an end, and the Families would have shelter from the unfriendly skies.*

**Chapters Four through Eight:** Similarly glowing prose about the Nichevos, Bandos, Heifos, Conceros and Francos families.

**Chapter Nine:** Visions sent by the various Spirits. The style of writing indicates there were several authors and that at some point an effort was made to reconcile their different styles. Each Family has legends of how one of their ancestors was the sole original author and a quite plausible tale as to how and why the chapter is in its current form. The only thing known for sure is that the source material is indeed of supernatural origin (just ask the Spirits, they'll tell you so). *And the Gods conferred among themselves. Never again would men be allowed the powers of Creation and Destruction, as had the Ancients. And such was passed to the Spirits, to be passed to men. But not all the Spirits were pure, and some were jealous of men, who had come into such powers without being created by the gods. And they planted the seeds of the Cataclysm in the hearts of men, that someday it might grow again, wiping the world clean of man, and leaving the Spirits the most favored of the Gods.*

In reality, no one knows exactly how much of the Book is accurate, its original authors, degree of spiritual inspiration or even if it dates to shortly after the Cataclysm. The first compiled edition dates to centuries later, though fragments are known to be older. Since each of the ruling Families in Novomad has some stake in the authenticity of the Book, no one really wants to cast the matter into doubt, and anyone who dares to do so (even with evidence) isn't going to get much support. On the other hand, expeditions are regularly financed to investigate the truths in the Book, especially those which actually have non-Book evidence to support them. Usually, these investigations are to support one Family claim or the other. The political gain to be had is often more important than the truth of the matter.

The gamemaster can make up obscure quotes from the Book to cover just about any situation. An allegory may be based on ancient events, with just enough detail to be tantalizing, but not enough to pursue without a lot of background work. Treasure hunters have volumes of annotations on the Book, listing and correlating what is known with what the Book says. Of course, the best of the annotations are kept secret, but enough treasure hunters have gotten rich (or come to gruesome ends) to make the more common annotated editions a bane to spiritual leaders and a popular reading item and discussion topic for long winter nights.