

DARK TIMES CYCLE

Peaceful times can't last forever. Unexpected wars will take thousands of lives in a couple of days. The great storm will make huge kingdoms starve. The curses sent by the gods will change the ordinary life for hundreds of years, destroying families, communities, and nations. But even in such dark times, there are those who want more. They are ready to lead the others. They know that it can't end like this.

The Dark Times cycle will provide players and GMs with three regions that suffer from various disasters. Adventures can make them fight and go into great battles, force them to defend, search for resources, gather allies, and prepare for upcoming attacks.

It's up to you to decide what happens in your campaign.

POWERLESS

So many terrible things have tortured these lands. Years of cold that cause famine. Floods washing away the villages behind them. Hurricanes that took away all of the living. But each time the inhabitants of the lands coped with disasters, appeasing their gods or other forces.

And who would have thought that the toughest trial of these lands will be its inhabitants.

LOST AGE

The people of this land have achieved so much and gone so far. No wonder they thought they were equal to the gods. Magical and scientific powers have generated many benefits for the inhabitants, but they have also become the tools in the hands of people who strive for power.

The last old day. The centuries of conflicts and wars that affected every nation and every family stopped on one day. Some call it the "Liberation Day"; some call it the "The End". On this day that the symbiosis of scientific achievements and magical discoveries showed people that none of them came close to divine. On this day the inhabitants observed a beautiful but deadly phenomenon - numerous shimmering rays soared to the sky and quickly began growing wider and wider, turning into foggy walls as high as the sky. During the day, they destroyed everything that got inside them and disappeared.

New times. The rays reached large sizes, covering many territories, some of which remained untouched. It is not known what was the better fate - to be absorbed by a powerful force and die quickly or try to avoid being killed by those who survived. The forces of the old world were destroyed. Kings and kingdoms, empires and emperors died on just one day, leaving their survived citizens alone with fear. Beasts and monsters that felt the advent of new times began to seize the territories they owned thousands of years ago. The power of law did not exist anymore, unleashing the hands of the most dishonorable and violent ones, who quickly assembled into groups for raids, looting, and control. Survived groups of the peoples moved away from once crowded lands, trying to find new lands for their families.

Consequences. In just a few days, the population declined several times. Not only those who had fled to the safe lands, untouched by the magical Sky walls, survived. Those who never had any magical abilities or talents managed to survive the deadly attack too. However, most of them died due to demolition inside the Sky walls.

Search for the culprits. Over time, the legends about people who caused such events began to spread over the lands more and more. There was no doubt that the deceitful emperors and duplicitous kings were involved in it. But who did they listen to more than anyone else? Who did they pay huge amounts of gold to destroy their enemies, to live forever? To be like the gods they had stopped listening to long ago?

The magicians. Old sages, with their blood full of contempt for everything living, natural, and spiritual. Young sorcerers who knew no boundaries of knowledge and wanted power like no other. Usual visionaries who lured ordinary people to their bonds, promising them wealth and land at exorbitant prices that got higher and higher. People with a piece of divine, supernatural powers that are beyond their control became guilty, in the opinion of those who survived the most terrible disaster these lands have ever seen.

SURVIVORS

A few months later, the lands were divided among several factions.

Communities of survivors. Communities of people united by a common problem. They try to live their own lives without getting into conflicts with others. Such communities may allow the presence of magicians, which enables them to meet their needs quicker but also causes great aggression among their neighbors and even among the people inside the community. Some communities expressly forbid people with magical powers to be on their territory. They are slower in coping with survival challenges and are more likely to lack resources.

COMMUNITIES FEATURES

1. The community is headed by a famous magician who has a lot of resources and means for survival. However, he also have more enemies.
2. The community is headed by a survived independent representative of the old elite and maintains class inequality. Such communities only keep in touch with communities of the same kind and buy off their enemies with their resources.
3. The community features a large number of people from different classes, races, and nations. Frequent disputes over responsibilities, disunity, and lack of a sole leader make it a desired target for external enemies.
4. The community has a violent and strict authoritarian regime. Its success stem from the hard work of individual residents, whose patience cannot be eternal.
5. A religious community that worships specific gods or a god. It includes only people who believe in the same gods and has its own rituals and traditions.
6. A community entirely consisting of members of the same race or nation. May have an expressed disregard to other races or nations, communicating and accepting only members of this community.

Bandits. Criminal gangs of people united by the purpose of rapid enrichment, gaining power, and access to resources. Can be part of an ordinary gang or can form separate settlements of mobsters.

BANDITS FEATURES

1. The gang is headed by a magician who controls its people with his leadership skills and fear but is scorned by the others.
2. The gang is engaged in kidnapping and selling people into slavery.
3. The gang consists of magicians who use their abilities for looting and attacks.
4. A settlement with the leader of a large criminal gang trying to establish a network of bandits for joint attacks on big targets.
5. A criminal gang that offers its security services to settlements and communities. Attacks them if they refuse.
6. A large settlement for various gangster gangs, where any open conflicts and confrontations are prohibited. Gangs and groups of bandits solve their problems in a peaceful way here; find new goals and share territories. Here you can also order special services, find the necessary goods, or learn the location of a certain person.

Barbarians. Small nations, communities of tribes united by a strong leader. Their priority is only their own people and no one else, so they often resort to raids and looting of lands.

BARBARIANS FEATURES

1. The tribe is headed by a strong leader who wants to enslave as many territories as possible.
2. The tribe consists of racial and ethnic minorities with distinctive customs and culture, who only want to find fertile and safe lands.
3. A steppe tribe that uses its special skills in armament and horse breeding for rapid and quick raids.
4. A tribe from the far south, worshipping an ancient god who wants to conquer the deserted lands.
5. A northern tribe that makes seasonal raids from the shores of large rivers and seas to feed their families in distant lands.
6. A wild community of tribes, hiding from civilization throughout its history, uses primitive methods of struggle to survive in a new world.

Clergy. Religious people who believe in various gods. Some serve in monasteries, the others are members of ruthless cults.

CLERGY FEATURES

1. A cult ruled by an ancient and forgotten god who rose from the depths of history to gain his power. The cult members hide, trying to take the highest possible position in the new world hierarchy and recruiting more and more people to serve their lord.
2. The cult of new gods that has long waited for such catastrophic events and welcomed them. Those who believe in new, unknown gods that are supposed to replace the old ones persuade the world to anarchy, willing to build their own world on its ruins.
3. The order of knights, continuing to serve the perished king and old god to the end. It protects the former inhabitants of the kingdom, especially other clergy, regardless of their magical powers.

4. The order of fallen knights tries to seize as much power as possible for further restoration of the civilization with their gods, ideals, and rules.
5. A monastic order that predicts such sequence of events and dedicates itself to informing the people about real reasons for such an outcome.
6. A monastic order that tries to preserve elusive scientific knowledge by forming the largest library of the New Age.

Fallen states. While the Sky walls swallowed up and destroyed the kingdoms and empires with their leaders, the following months have completely torn apart once great and glorious states. There is nothing left in place of many of them, and the locals have long forgotten the emperors they used to serve. But there are also some states that managed to preserve their image, formed by sweat and blood of their ancestors. Such states are often just one big city, open for trade and those who want to settle there and observe its rules. And of course, such territories are a luring target for all enemies around.

CITY-STATES FEATURES

1. The once great state is still headed by its king, who survived the disaster and became a sacred figure for his subjects.
2. A rich city-state that is a harbor for people with magical powers whose ready to pay a huge amount of money their safety.
3. A city-state of commerce that allows selling absolutely anything, including people, on its territories. It is protected by a criminal gang.
4. A city-state of the former empire, famous for its art of war. Currently, it offers military force for hire in exchange for resources to survive.
5. A city-state that is engaged in the search for magical artifacts and accumulates forces for expansion.
6. A city-state, which has accumulated enough forces and resources to expand its territories and regain its former glory and power.

LONGFALL REGION

The lands that were later called Longfall were hit hardest by the Sky walls. The earth fell apart under the one's feet, taking entire cities into the darkness. People who used to live for generations in these lands would hardly recognize it now.

The epicenter of the disaster. In its territory, Longfall unites the borders of several nations that have almost completely disappeared in the Sky walls. For a long time, there was no one in these lands - survivors struggled for their lives in the areas with far less or no destruction. When those areas ran out of resources, were overtaken by brutal dictatorships, or began to suffer from unbearable bandit raids, people started to rediscover their former territories. Longfall became one of those lands.

Unknown territories. The territories of Longfall are full of surprises. The roads that have remained from the old days are tangled and often lead nowhere. Forests and creatures living in them have changed, taking over new territories that were once occupied by people. The changed landscape not only erased large cities from the earth but also revealed mysteries that were inaccessible for millennia.

Real treasures. Gold still doesn't play a big role after what happened. A real divine gift for the survivors will be the climate, which will not turn a recently built house into ruins; a land capable of yielding good harvests; an area that is easy to defend against beasts and bandits. All this can be found in Longfall, but those who strive to it should hurry up, as the rumors about these lands are spreading among many people, including bloodthirsty figures.

LONGFALL LANDS

Longfall may be rich in fruitful lands and resources, but everything has its price.



Magical holes. A powerful magic of the Sky walls has destroyed the tissue of the natural and magical world, leaving strange and dangerous phenomena behind. Magic holes are fickle; sometimes they disappear in an hour, sometimes months later.

MAGIC HOLES FEATURES

1. The magic threads are torn here, so the magic doesn't work in this place.
2. Spells of a certain magic school (Illusion, Necromancy, etc.) do not work here.
3. Spells of a certain magic school (Illusion, Necromancy, etc.) have an intensified effects here.
4. Illusion in this place is particularly strong, creating things that do not exist (a picture of the past or even a possible future; thoughts turn into voices that can be heard by everyone, etc.).
5. Loud sounds generate bursts of magic here that try attacking the troublemaker.
6. The magic in this place puts the travelers to sleep.
7. A strong magic item traps those who have a weak will, making them its temporary servant.
8. Portals randomly appear in the territory of the magic hole.
9. The course of time in the magic hole is slowed down/ accelerated.
10. Distortions in magic allow creatures to take up abode into each other's bodies when touched.

Settlements. A few are able to wander endlessly in search of resources. Discovered ruins of the city may be suitable both for temporary shelter and for a complete start of a new life. If the one is ready to face the imminent dangers that lie in Longfall.

SETTLEMENTS FEATURES

1. Destroyed empty city, where bandits come back every night for an overnight stop.
2. A community of people occupied an old village and built a fortification around it.

3. A royal palace seized by barbarians led by a powerful leader.
4. A large city the territories of which regularly become a bone of discord for both people and beasts.
5. A mountain village occupied by bandits, with a secret passage through catacombs leading to it.
6. A settlement hidden by a magic hole where people pay for safety with the obligation to follow special rules because of uncontrolled magic (it is not allowed to talk/ turn around/ make loud noises/ think about the past, etc.).

Monasteries. A human-caused disaster made many people think about the transience and unpredictability of the world around and about the things everyone will face after death. In the past, churches and monasteries have increasingly lost their influence and renown, but things are different now. Many monasteries through which the Sky walls had passed managed to endure it. The lands on which they stand are now inviolable and sacred. Except for the barbarians, who still consider them as a very expensive piece of stone, albeit tastefully made.

MONASTERIES FEATURES

1. A closed monastery with a single monk few hundred years old, watching dawns of the empires. Now he has shut himself in four walls and surrounded the monastery with illusion of the presence of formidable warriors that guard it.
2. A once-rich monastery, gathering the best warriors and knights under its command to begin the «holy purge» of all lands from the «unworthy» people.
3. An empty monastery that hides powerful artifacts, which should not be reached by the hand of an evil man, behind a network of mazy underground labyrinths.
4. A monastery, where anyone can be taught the secrets and forgotten arts for a lot of gold.
5. A monastery where the one can get answers to personal questions for great services to certain God.
6. A monastery controlled by a well-known gang that receives part of its profits and learns about the latest rumors through the monks.

Castles. Both small and huge fortresses, which were awarded by kings and emperors to their particularly skillful subjects. Now most of these territories are destroyed and conceal both treasures and members of various cults hidden in their depths.

CASTLES FEATURES

1. A castle that seemed empty at first glance turns out to be an ambush of cult members, looking for prey for their ritual.
2. A looted castle that has become a lair for bandits trying to find a secret door to a dungeon full of treasures.
3. A ruined castle, in the ruins of which there is an entrance to the old catacombs from where the monsters come out every night to hunt.
4. A castle, which looks like a peaceful settlement but conceals slaves in its deep corridors for subsequent resale.
5. A castle with an old lonely knight, the last of his order. He is the keeper of secret knowledge and arts, but he no longer sees the goal of sharing them with anyone.
6. A castle is a base for a reviving knightly order that promises to avenge every survived magician for the death of the king.

Hideouts. Not everyone in Longfall wants to live in cities and castles noticeable from afar. Sometimes it's better to find shelter in an old cave in the woods, far away from the roads. But such wanderer should remember - those places keep their own secrets.

HIDEOUTS FEATURES

1. A cave with a small narrow passage turns out to be a temporary camp for scouts of the wild southern tribe.
2. A barely noticeable descent down the mountain leads to a cavity, where bandits share the loot in their hideout.
3. The tracks running into the forest will lead to a camp of cult members who prepare a deadly ritual.
4. Torn bodies of animals lead to the lair of the monster waiting for prey in an ambush.
5. Strange dull screams will lead wanderers to the beast's old lair, where barbarians are extorting the location of camp from tied up bandits.
6. Beneath the abandoned farms, there is a maze of tunnels where forest creatures bring the provisions they found.

CURSE FROM THE NORTH

You can use the Cursed any time in your campaign. When it seems that the heroes have coped with many troubles, there is a new challenge that will pose a threat to everything that was achieved by hard work. Or, an already big conflict in the region, which exposes to danger mice and men, aggravates when a third (fourth? fifth?) side in the form of a terrifying and uncontrollable force appears. It's up to you!

Longfall was not a quiet and peaceful land even in peacetime. It's better to keep some secrets hushed; otherwise, the consequences can be terrible.

The dark past. There were many rumors, legends, and beliefs observed by all civilians, the absurdity of which sometimes amused the wanderers. Not to look at the eyes of a killed animal? Lock oneself in a house and stay there if the birds no longer fly? Set a field on fire if you find a bone in it, even if it's a small rodent? The locals have conveyed the fear of the nature around them from generation to generation, not doubting for a moment about who is the true master of these lands.

Echoes from the North. What happened to the world couldn't help but affect the dark secrets of Longfall. At first, all this seems to be just rumors that can be heard in the settlements - strange voices and shouts, shadows sneaking behind the back, growling outside the camp. But all of a sudden caravans from the northern tribe stopped going the usual way. The head of a friendly settlement did not come to important negotiations concerning the redistribution of territories. The barbaric tribe, which used to torture the native lands with attack months long, disappeared completely. And legends no longer seem so ridiculous.

In search of death. The North, full of mysteries and resources, still attracts many people and creatures who want to learn its secrets. Wanderers who go there will find that the deeper you go into the local mountains and forests, the more obscure the road home becomes. Places that used to be full of barbaric tribes recently are now empty. Their camps and settlements have been destroyed and burned down by their inhabitants. What could have frightened them so much? What forced them to leave these lands and search for the new territories that were already occupied, engaging in conflicts with other tribes, communities, and even city-states.

Cursed. Survivors do not even need to go to the dangerous northern lands to learn the truth, because soon they would have learned everything themselves. The threat from the North, which frightened even the bravest warriors, has now come to the lands of Longfall.

Creatures that can take the form of both humans and monsters attack the villages, towns, and camps in disordered crowds. With their bright red eyes, they know no mercy and destroy everything on their way. Their targets are unknown and their travels are unpredictable. The inhabitants of Longfall will only have to pray to their gods for some time to prepare.

New challenges. The life in Longfall is hard even without the Cursed. But recently it has become more chaotic and cruel than ever. Not all existing factions are ready to face the new threats - many will use it to achieve their own goals. More and more conflicts can both form unexpected alliances and set on the long-time fellows to fight for the limited resources.

POSSIBLE GOALS OF THE CURSED

1. The cursed attack only the lands where there are people with magical powers.
2. The cursed attack only those who have no magical powers, without noticing the magicians.
3. The cursed search for a special place or a valuable item that has been found by some of the survivors.
4. The cursed try to get to the magical objects by absorbing them and becoming stronger.
5. The cursed fulfill the will of an ancient tribe of barbarians who almost enslaved Longfall thousands of years ago.
6. The cursed are controlled by an old magician who has decided to go up against everything that survived in the world to revenge his fallen brothers.