

Introduction

Northwest Kansas is a bare, flat land. Fallow fields stretch out mile upon mile, occasionally marked by an oasis of thick, twisting trees or sparse grass. Here, the sun heats up the highway like a griddle that stretches on forever.

This land is open, horizons broadening out like an endless sea even in the towns that cling to the ever-shifting dust, always dwarfed by the clouds that sail in monolithic fleets through the dark blue sky.

There is a tinge of the eternal in this land, like you could walk the roads for a lifetime and still find yourself lost in the flat Purgatory of the plains. This is a place where men and their works seem smaller somehow, where it seems like the hand of God could reach down at any moment and sweep away a town in a roar of winds and blare of trumpets.



This isn't a strong place. The towns are small and dirty, still suffering from not becoming railroad stops during the Wild West days. Most of the shops have been closed, their paint beginning to peel and their boarded-up windows squinting forlornly out onto grey skies. Lonesome farms dot the landscape, sheltered by a few trees and occasionally connected by dirt roads.

Small windmills turn in the wind, almost an anachronism when one thinks of the towering windfarms not two hundred miles away. Everything about the land seems to be leaning forward, as if waiting for the seasons to change or the rest of the world to slow and let this place catch up. In the winter, the fields lie fallow, waiting to be turned and reborn in golden horizons.



Seasons change quickly around here, however, and a new age was ushered into these people's lives not with a party or prayer, but with a storm. Called the Freak Storm by many, this outpouring of nature's fury appeared out of nowhere, defying all weather predictions. That was not the only thing that was strange about this storm, though. On that fateful night, green lightning flashed through clouds that seemed set alight with white fire.

Unearthly choruses accompanied the howling wind, rising in a swelling crescendo until, just before dawn, the storm vanished in a final, ground-shaking clap of thunder. Later on, when the storm had ascended to the place of legends, there were even tales of the dead rising from their graves.

Regardless of the fictions, one fact was obvious to everyone when they emerged from their houses: they had entered a new age, a time of brutal horror and quiet miracles. They faced a life in The Land of Ill Harvest.

