

INTRODUCTION TO THE WILD SOUTHWEST

It is the year 2096. Maybe...

The Great War that destroyed the technological society of the 20th century took place at some point between the years 2000 and 2020. It was a worldwide conflict involving massive quantities of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of unimaginable power. Knowledge of who started it, why it was fought and what nations were on which side is long lost. All that is known is that it was the most devastating war in history - engulfing every nation on earth - and that all of the world's major urban centres, and their inhabitants, were destroyed.

More than half the world's population was killed in nuclear and chemical strikes, and from vicious bio-plagues unleashed as weapons. Over 99% of the survivors perished during the twenty year nuclear winter that followed. For ten of those years it is said that the sun wasn't even visible in the sky, and even the exact year was forgotten.

When the world finally emerged from the devastation, the climate had altered. The weather and biosphere had reached a new equilibrium, one much colder and drier than previously. Lakes and rivers shrank and dried up, deserts spread, forests withered, rainfall patterns shifted, and when it did rain it was more likely to be cold sleet or even snow. Even the ocean had been disrupted, and surviving charts of tides and currents were useless. What survived of humanity had to start again, in a harsh and hostile new world.

Western Australia came off fairly lightly in the Great War. While the major urban centres of the coastal strip were devastated by nuclear and chemical attacks, the south coast was left relatively untouched. While there were strikes, they were carried out with conventional weapons, leaving none of the fallout, poisons and disease spores plaguing other regions. As rainfall contracted southwards, the few survivors followed, establishing a new society in the only part of the state - and perhaps the entire country - still able to support agriculture. They worked hard, restoring, recovering and improvising technologies, and over time their situation moved from desperate, through precarious, to stable, and the Southern States were born.

In the west, facing the Indian Ocean and receiving the most of the remaining rainfall is D'Entrecasteaux, the forest state. From its capital of Pemberton it supplies the States with lumber and paper, while its military - the D'Entrecasteaux Defence Corps - patrol the north and west borders against the warlords of the Leeuwin and Naturaliste peninsulas, and from time to time make strikes deep into their territory. Its inhabitants (and everyone else) pronounce the state's name as "Doncastro".

To the east of D'Entrecasteaux is Frankland. The best agricultural land remaining in the south is found in its river valleys, and a wide variety of produce including grapes, olives, apples and even oranges and tomatoes are grown here. Honey is also a major export. The capital is Walpole. The Frankland Border Patrol guard the northern frontier, and excise tolls and taxes from travelers and traders entering and leaving the state.

Next is the smallest and most urbanised state, Denmark. Over 30% of the population live in and around the capital of Denmark Town, the rest are spread along the coast, or in a few inland settlements. The main industry is pig and wheat farming. The Denmark Defence

Force is under-equipped and under-manned, the Porongurup Rangers defend most of the State under an agreement resented by many ordinary Denmarkers.

East of Denmark lies Porongurup, the most populous and prosperous state. Its capital, Albany, is the largest city in the south, possibly in the whole world. Its industries and exports are many, including bone and oil from the whaling station, wheat from the vast fields around Mount Barker and the Porongurup Range, and even ammunition and machine parts. Gifted with the best natural harbour in the entire south, Albany is also home to the largest trading fleet of all the states - much of its wealth comes from shipping taxes and excises. Albany also retains a number of pre-war technologies including electricity (from the steam fired Oyster Harbour Power Station at Emu Point), a railway to Mt Barker and even weather prediction, courtesy of the still functioning Mt Clarence radar station. The Porongurup Rangers are the best trained and best equipped military force in the south, combined with the natural barrier of the Stirling Range on the state's northern border this makes Porongurup almost unassailable.

Finally, farthest east is Pallinup. The largest state, it is also the driest, and the least populous. Its inhabitants are nomadic shepherds, herding their flocks over the arid landscape in a yearly cycle. Its capital is the tiny trading settlement of Bremer Bay in the far east. With few fixed settlements and the barren Desert to the north Pallinup has no need for a military force, it would have trouble raising enough troops anyway.

To the north, in the semi-arid lands between the States and the Desert lie the Independent Settlements, three dozen or so farming communities of varying size and wealth. Some are tiny villages, others can make a claim to the title of "towns". Life in these lands is hard, droughts, raiding parties from the Warlord Realms and even the occasional wandering mutant make life hazardous, but the people are tough, and proud of their independence. The de-facto capital of the Settlements - and the largest of them - is the town of Borden, north of the Stirling Ranges.

Borden has three notable features. It possesses high earth ramparts, constructed by army engineers just after the war. These surround the entire town making it highly defensible. It contains the largest library of pre-war materials in existence, collected over many years and fiercely guarded. These lead the Bordenites to claim the current year is 2094, two years earlier than the date accepted by the states. Most of the independent Settlements follow their lead in this. Finally Borden is defended by the Borden Engineers, the most professionally trained and well equipped militia in the Settlements. The Engineers would be capable of taking on even the Porongurup Rangers or DDC.

Borden has a very good relationship with the States, in particular Porongurup, acting in many ways as the link between the Settlements and the States. Many settlements refuse to even listen to envoys from the States, but will at least listen to what Borden has to say. Acting as a negotiator Borden has solved many disputes between the other settlements and the States, which otherwise might have erupted into open war. It has also organised defensive pacts and trade deals between individual settlements, and is the heart of resistance against the Warlords.

To the west of the Independent Settlements lie the Warlord Realms. Based on the semi-

fertile lands of the Leeuwin and Naturaliste peninsulas, the Warlord Realms are ruled by a series of petty bandits and dictators, each holding control over a small warband and a small area of territory. Raids for food, livestock, new soldiers and slaves are sent against each other, the Independent Settlements, and even occasionally D'Entrecasteaux and Frankland. Or at least that's how it used to be.

Over the last eight years a single Warlord known as Alexis Vasse has seized control over a large part of the northern Warlord Realms. Starting out as the leader of small warband operating near the ruins of Busselton he has systematically assimilated or eliminated most of the surrounding warbands, amassing an impressive force under his banner. Busselton has been resurrected as his capital, and is rapidly becoming a major economic and trading town, and the heart of a booming slave trade. His intentions for the future remain unknown, but he is widely believed to be planning to challenge the States at some point.

His chief rival is Anthony Barker, ruler of a substantial realm of allied warbands around the town of Margaret River. The two have not come to open blows as yet, but there have been several skirmishes between Barker's warbands and Busselton scouting parties in the Whicher Range.

To the north of the Warlord Realms lie the Radlands - the devastated and polluted coastal strip stretching north from the old city of Bunbury. No one ventures here except the individuals called Scavengers, or Scavs. These brave, tough and somewhat deranged men and women travel into the Radlands in search of technology, equipment and other relics that can be salvaged and re-sold in the south. Most die young, killed either by the truly monstrous creatures inhabiting the radiation scarred landscape, or by cancers and plagues contracted through their repeated journeys to these dangerous regions.

Inland from the Radlands and lying north of the Independent Settlements is the Desert. A barren, lifeless dune sea, stretching forever into the unknown. Some Scavs penetrate it's edges, a few even reaching the ruins of the old towns of York, Northam, and Kellerberrin but trying to travel any further means certain death from thirst and dehydration. If the stories are to be believed, somewhere in the heart of the Desert lies the lost city of Kalgoorlie, a paradise where the beer flowed freely and the streets were paved with gold, but most regard this as nothing but an old legend.

Further north and east is unknown. Travel across the desert is impossible, and no ship has made it farther east than the hazardous islands of the Recherche Archipelago and returned. The few radios still operating have never picked up any signals from outside of the States, and the transmitters available are too weak to send signals more than a few hundred miles. As far as anyone knows the south-west is the last bastion of humanity and civilisation in the entire world.