

SALISBURY PLAIN

By Andrew Kenrick for 'Hot War'

As busy as they will no doubt be kept in London, at some point the characters will want to venture beyond the city boundaries. There are many reasons to lure the characters from the comparatively safe surroundings of the capital, such as attempts to uncover hidden information or retrieve artefacts of the war. Greater needs might drive a character into the unknown wastes beyond the city, such as a desperate rescue mission or the need to find a vaccine for a twisted strain of a virus. There are several locations detailed in Hot War along the south coast (Fort Halstead) and much further north (Windscale), but the west of England offers some interesting possibilities for exploration and adventure. One of the largest - and potentially most hazardous - areas that the characters could find themselves is Salisbury Plain, a large expanse of grassland and moor in the south-west of England.

PROFILE - SALISBURY PLAIN

Since the nineteenth century, Salisbury Plain has had a strong association with the armed forces, in particular the Army. A large, chalk plain lying within the county of Wiltshire, Salisbury Plain's sparsely-populated grassland naturally lent itself to use for training exercises involving large numbers of men and armoured vehicles. In the early decades of the twentieth century the Army began buying up land on the plain, creating the Army Training Estate Salisbury Plain, an area covering nearly half of the area of the plain, some 150 square miles. In 1943 the estate was used to train for Operation Overlord, the abandoned villages and fields providing the perfect practise ground to replicate the countryside of Northern Europe.

Much of the area is closed to the public, to protect them from the dangers of live artillery fire and unexploded munitions, but what other exercises could have been carried out on the windswept plains? After the Second World War the plain continued to double for Northern Europe, this time in preparation for war against the Soviets. As well as against more mundane foes, it is likely that the plains were used to practise engagements against more esoteric opponents in anticipation of warfare against twisted technology and mobile biological entities.

What happened on Salisbury Plain during the War is unknown. The high concentration of Army personnel, not to mention the likely presence of twisted technology, would have made it a high priority target for the Soviets.

Whilst a nuclear strike might not have been effective over such a large area, the plains were likely to be the sites for heavy deployment of Soviet troops and twisted technology. The RAF's subsequent bombing of Porton Down is likely to have irradiated much of the surrounding area, including much of the plains, but no doubt life – of a sort – still survives there.

The high levels of radiation, combined with the inherent if mundane danger of the plains (unexploded bombs, for one), make a journey west a dangerous mission indeed. And that's not considering the possible expansion of the Zone of Alienation west as well as north. Yet there are many reasons for venturing to Salisbury Plain. Whilst much of the munitions and vehicles are likely to have been used, destroyed or stolen since the war, there are no doubt large stockpiles that can be salvaged by desperate characters. Even more so, there are characters eager for answers that may lie within the wreckage of isolated Army bases, abandoned stations or long-sealed bunkers.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

IMBER

Never a populous, wealthy or notable village, up until 1943 Imber stood amidst the farmlands of Salisbury Plain. At the height of the Second World War, the Army compulsorily purchased the village, forcibly evicting the population. The village became the centre of the preparations for Operation Overlord, preparing the Allied forces for the eventual invasion of Europe and the hostile house-to-house fighting that awaited them there. During the War the village saw action once more, only this time the fighting was real. Today the village lies in ruins, eerily empty and abandoned, the only intact building the church of St. Giles that stands watch over the settlement like a stone sentinel. Surely a settlement, any settlement, would attract refugees looking for shelter? Yet Imber remains eerily empty, as though something else has taken up residence there.

THE FURROW

Bisecting the northern half of Salisbury Plain like an ugly scar is a deep, burnt furrow that stretches for over a mile. This rent in the earth was created when a Vulcan bomber ploughed into the ground during the War, and the remains of the bomber itself lies at the southern end of the Furrow. The Vulcan itself might not be salvageable, but its bomb bays could still hold nuclear bombs, or stranger devices still. But claiming them won't be easy, as the Furrow seems to attract strange and terrible things like moths to a flame.

PORTON DOWN

Perhaps one of the main reasons for characters to journey beyond London to the west towards Salisbury Plain is Porton Down, lying some 5 miles to the east of the plain. Porton Down lay at the heart of the War and the British governments experiments into twisted technology, and within its remains could lay the secrets to victory... or utter destruction.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

THE DISPOSSESSED

The war created countless refugees, many of whom tried to flee to London. Some got there, most died in the attempt, but there were those who didn't quite make it... in more than one sense of the word. The Dispossessed are those refugees who survive out in the wilderness, roaming Salisbury Plain as wandering gangs or settling in one of the ruined settlements or bunkers that dot the plain. They are a wretched folk scarred by the horrors of war experienced firsthand, their sanity hanging by a dangling thread and their bodies wracked and ruined by the irradiated landscape. They care not for figures of authority, having long since been rejected or abandoned by society, and any who venture into their midst had best be careful. Yet for many who survived the war, the Dispossessed remain the best chance for a semblance of a normal life out on the plain, a family amidst which to shelter and forget the horrors that they have endured.

MAJOR ROGER VAUNTRY

Once a renowned tank commander within the British Army, Major Roger Vantry of the 1st Royal Tank Regiment served in the Second World War with valour and honour, fighting as part of the invasion of Normandy. During the recent War, Vantry was part of the operation to defend the south of England known as Operation BULLION. BULLION was designed to curtail the advances of the enemy, whether Soviet trooper or Mobile Biological Weapon, by any means necessary, including a scorched earth policy that involved the shelling of English towns and columns of refugees. Whilst a veteran of warfare, turning his guns on his own countrymen shattered Vantry's mind and he abandoned his post and fled into the wilds. He roams the plain today, believing himself to be a knight of old defending his people. Sometimes he does just that, riding in his tank to save a band of Dispossessed from some horror. But other times all he remembers are his final orders, and it is his own people that he turns his guns upon.

MONSTERS

THE RUIN

The fighting over Salisbury Plain was fierce, engagements involving dozens or more armoured vehicles. Much of the wreckage of these conflicts dots the plain still, muddy trails and torn-up battlefields covered with rusting tanks and still-smouldering materiel. Despite its value to scavengers, a great deal of this scrap is left untouched. The reasons for this are the creatures known as the Ruin.

Hulking creatures of rusting iron and dirty oil, more akin to a machine than a monster, the Ruin can be found wherever there is wreckage born of death and destruction. To the casual observer they are simply piles of rusting metal comprising tanks, half-tracks, Jeeps and weapons, until they begin to move of their own volition. They judder into life like an infernal engine starting, belching exhaust fumes and roaring like jet engines, before fixing their steel eyes upon a victim to crush and tear apart.

There were no reported sightings of the Ruin during the war, but in the aftermath a great many battlefields were alleged to have been visited by these creatures. Whether they are man-made warmachines or monsters from another reality given form by battlefield detritus is unclear, but the end result is the same - nigh-unstoppable creatures of metal that lumber out of the wreckage of war.

