

WASTELAND CAMPAIGN GM SETTING BIBLE (SoCal Pocket)

High concept

Earth First didn't "start a war," they **engineered a misunderstanding**. They set nuclear reactors worldwide to fail, world leaders read it as coordinated attack, then nukes started flying. Mutinies, spies, fractured command, and sheer panic stopped the exchange short of total extinction. The result is a shattered patchwork, pockets of livable civilization surrounded by dead zones, fires, fallout, and factions that formed fast because they either already existed or had plans ready.

This campaign lives in one of those pockets, coastal North County San Diego and the edges of inland Riverside, where water and ammo are the real currency, and "advanced tech" is rare enough to feel like myth until it suddenly isn't.

Tone pillars

- **Scarcity realism:** water, food, antibiotics, ammo, fuel, batteries.
 - **Faction pressure cooker:** everyone has a reason they can't just "be nice."
 - **Weird is concentrated:** most places are human politics, a few places are full sci-fi horror.
 - **Violence is expensive:** bullets matter, injuries matter, consequences ripple.
-

The truth vs what people believe

What most survivors believe

"China, North Korea, Russia, someone started bombing, the USA responded, domino effect." People argue who shot first, because it feels like that argument is the last piece of the old world they can still debate.

The real truth (GM truth)

Earth First sabotaged nuclear reactors globally, making failures look like coordinated attacks. Nukes were launched in the confusion, and then **internal mutinies and sabotage inside militaries** prevented full annihilation. It doesn't matter who shot first to the survivors, but if you want a "first wave," North Korea, Ukraine, and the USA were among the earliest to launch.

When is it, and why factions exist so fast

You want 2023 and you also want mature factions, checkpoints, slavery farms, propaganda, and organized road control. That can work cleanly with one framing choice:

Canon framing: “Time blur”

Players lived Day 0 in detail, then there was a **blurred montage** of weeks where survival became routine. Even if it was not spoken at the table, it’s now true in-world that after the initial days, time stopped feeling real, and the region slid into a new normal.

Recommended present day: 6 to 10 weeks after Day 0.

This preserves the “we played the apocalypse happening” vibe, while letting factions plausibly entrench.

If you ever need to justify something that feels “too organized,” use this line:

- “They didn’t form, they activated.”
-

Timeline you can run from

Use this as your default campaign calendar.

Phase 1: The Flash (Day 0 to Day 3)

- Simultaneous reactor failures begin worldwide.
- Leaders interpret it as an attack, early nuclear launches.
- Nationwide command and communication collapse shortly after nukes start falling.
- Roads become unsafe, water and food become scavenged, caught, or distilled.

Phase 2: The Snap (Week 1 to Week 3)

- Local authority nodes consolidate, especially police and Guard.
- Earth First begins deniable cleanup, recruitment, and containment.
- Early checkpoints appear, initially “friendly,” quickly politicized.
- First organized slavery labor appears where extremists seize nurseries and neighborhoods.

Phase 3: The Lines (Week 4 to Week 10)

- Road control becomes the primary power.
- Trade becomes possible but fragile.

- Weird tech starts surfacing in rumors, then in reality.
 - Your main clock, the virus, becomes the invisible doomsday behind everything else.
-

The playable region

Boundaries

- **South:** Oceanside Beach
- **West and North:** Indian Potrero
- **East:** Rincon
- **Escape valve:** Anza Borrego desert, but the gate is controlled by Pala.

Macro hazard layout

- **North:** radiation fallout pockets
- **South:** destruction plus fallout, scorched infrastructure
- **West:** major fire damage plus heavy Earth First activity
- **East:** radiation fallout plus the Pala Reserve acting as border control into the desert

Roads and movement rules (core to your campaign)

- **All highways and freeways have checkpoints**, friendly or hostile depending on faction standing and current tensions.
- **76:** relatively safer east of the 15 if you stand well with Pala, west becomes “wild west” but survivable with protection.
- **15:** Calaveras presence spreading north and south up to the 76 interchange, Rainbow defends itself but is constantly skirmishing.
- **Surface streets:** “safe” depends on patrol ownership and the time of day.

Radio reality

- Ham-to-ham works, pirate stations exist.
 - Big towers are mostly dead, power draw is too high.
 - Radios are how factions project identity, fear, and propaganda.
-

Rules of the Weird

Advanced tech frequency

Pre-apocalypse it was underground, hidden by secretive government projects and radical Illuminati-type groups. Now it surfaces like random anomalies. Over time it becomes more common, but right now it feels like “myth made real.”

Orange mist, hard rules

- Origin: alien-created gas.
- Effect: transforms living beings into Bio-Munchers after **continuous inhalation for a full turn (6 seconds)**.
- Safe edge: you can dart through it for a moment, panic breathing is what kills you.
- Protection: gas mask or strong air filter blocks it.
- Persistence: lingers for hours, takes time to dissipate.
- Targets: affects animals and humans with respiratory systems.

Bio-Munchers

- One species, but **mass scaling**, more biomass makes them more dangerous and “bio-static.”
- Horror angle: humans turned into biomass often retain shape but lose intelligence, zombie-like.
- Consistent weakness: **fire**.
- Encounter role: swarm attrition with occasional horror beats and “bigger mass” threats.

Radiation and mutation

- Radiation zones are mostly off-limit map hazards, long exposure causes sickness and major damage.
 - Mutations are mostly Earth First's deliberate work, targeted radiation plus gene therapy, not random fallout magic.
-

Faction dossiers

California National Guard

Leader: Abe “Sandy” Adegoke

Look: dress shirt, tie, dress pants, shoulder holster with a 1911 at all times

Goal: maintain order and reestablish contact with other states

Status: chain of command intact, no outside contact, bureaucracy suffocates action

Bottlenecks: food, indecision, political fractures

Locations: Camp Pendleton North, Camp Pendleton South airstrip destroyed

GM use: The Guard is a sleeping giant. They can become saviors, occupiers, or split into rival commands depending on how the virus clock and local warlords pressure them.

Fallbrook Police Department (FPD)

Leader: Captain David Nisleit

Goal: maintain law in the wasteland, legally or less than legally when necessary

Law style: “10 commandments” practical morality, nobody cares about petty infractions unless you threaten safety

Detention: cells in an air station building, chains and locks, fed and watered, latrines allowed

Officer code: do not beat prisoners

Funding: volunteers and trade, FRN provides food, FPD provides protection

Locations: Fallbrook HQ and sheriff facilities in town

Current political problem: people want a real prison system but manpower is too thin, capital punishment becomes tempting.

GM use: FPD is your “order anchor.” Any plot that destabilizes them destabilizes the whole region, which is exactly what FOAK and CM want.

Fallbrook Resilience Network (FRN), merged with FUC

Leader: Dr. Isabella “Izzy” Reyes, cautious, brilliant, cowardly under pressure

Co-leader energy: Amelia “Wren” Prescott, brave, abrasive, action-oriented

Moral line: no human experimentation, no torture, no deals with FOAK, be self-sustainable

Power: currently has the Biomass Reactor, previously relied on gas generators

Relationship to FPD: protected by FPD, feeds FPD via tech and production

Clean merge model

- FRN is the institution, infrastructure, science, comms, power, production.
- FUC is the culture, recruitment, outreach, morale, expedition leadership.
- Izzy runs systems, Wren runs missions, they clash constantly.

GM use: FRN is your “tech temptation.” They can save lives, but every advancement draws attention from Earth First and every compromise tests their moral line.

Proud Boys, Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (FOAK)

Leader: Agustus Sol Invictus
Look: suit with yellow-black striped polo, gunshot holes in it
Goal: take what's left of the US as a white nationalist patriarch
Size: started around 100, losses and constant recruitment
Discipline: militia cosplayers with guns, panic when hurt, mixed with zealous true believers and trophy-hunting psychopaths
Control: neighborhoods for housing, nurseries for food, patrols more than checkpoints
Justice: disorganized, often individual "judge jury executioner," if the enemy is white they may escalate to leadership judgment
No jail: slavery labor instead
Propaganda: racist pirate radio, "neet" voice reciting hate speech and stolen media
Relationship to Beebe: none needed, they were already heavily armed

Current monthly objective: steal FPD water supply.

GM use: FOAK is your cruelty engine. They are not strategic geniuses, they are violent opportunists, which makes them dangerous in chaotic ways.

Christian Fellowship

Leader: Shannon Smith
Population: 60 to 115
Services: food kitchens, shelter, medical, schooling
Defense: weak, relies on proximity to FPD territory, when threatened uses polite warnings by armed local leaders, escalates to deadly force to protect "children of God"
Isolation: largely isolated, inward-facing community
Internal conflict: split between Hispanic and white Christians, plus FOAK trickle-ins who claim FOAK is unchristian but bring poison with them

GM use: This is the moral battleground faction, where "doing the right thing" is complicated by fear, prejudice, and infiltration. They are a perfect place for tense social sessions, quiet betrayals, and hard choices.

Calaveras de la Muerte (CM)

Leader: Loi Khac Nguyen "Thai"
Structure: cartel-like mafia, boss, underboss, advisor, capos, soldiers, associates
Core goals: control the 15 and 76, dominate trade by owning the roads, destroy old law (FPD), acquire guns and recreational luxuries, recruit controllable felons for manpower and loyalty webs
Water: currently fine due to resort access, wants road control to guarantee supply shipments

Prisoners: valuable as labor, recruits, bargaining chips, and sympathy plays

Trade dominance: enforced via road control, tolls, “protection,” and selective violence

Beebe hook: “Courtesy of CM” supply gifts are an offer, exclusive business and protection for Beebe’s family

GM use: CM is the “professional evil.” They can be negotiated with, and that’s the trap. They make stability feel possible if you just accept their rules.

Raiders of the Deadlands

Leader: Donovan “Danny” Calderone

Territory: Rolling Hills Estates, ringed by rickety white-painted wooden barrier wall, spikes, patrols, a dead parody of the white picket fence

Raids for: fuel, ammo, captives, food, tech

Two-persona myth: “trade Danny” and “murder Danny” are treated like separate people, recruits believe it, enemies suspect it, nobody cares because the confusion is useful

Culture: weaponized status quo, release of primal urges outward so the inside can feel peaceful

GM use: This faction is a mirror, the “safe community” that is only safe because it exports horror.

Earth First and Bubo

Public awareness: most don’t know the name, only those who interrogated mercs or were mercs

Strategy: sabotage civilization, then erase humanity

Main plan: virus nearing completion, bombs equipped with pathogen as delivery

Plan B: biomechanical mech rampage, wildlife respected, mech incomplete and faulty

Leader: Bubo, AI in a subterranean bunker under a town, self-named after the bubonic plague

Immortality trick: can transfer consciousness partially or wholly via biological and electrical means, nearly impossible to permanently destroy

Human layer: loyal servants, excited to die for the cause

“Green” assets: contracted pre-apocalypse mercenaries plus new wasteland recruitment

Payments: drops, luxuries, ransom, influence, anything that buys soldiers

Touch points: manipulates simple organisms for messages and tasks, pigeons as couriers, ant colonies as staging, dung beetles as retrieval tools

Limitations: can’t test virus enough, bandwidth split across too many problems, avoids being publicly known to avoid defensive burdens

Footprint: vans appear and vanish, hidden entrances, disappearances, sudden wildlife anomalies, inexplicably guarded zones

GM use: Earth First is your invisible hand. Even when they are not on screen, they can be behind sudden shifts, “random” missions, and terrifying ecological signs.

Key people roster (quick reference)

Core authority and allies

- **Captain David Nisleit:** FPD anchor, respected, pragmatic, trying to avoid brutality while holding the line.
- **Marna:** sergeant, escort muscle, loyal to David.
- **Memphis and Monte:** cops Lin worked with, chill professionals, good for grounded scenes.
- **Ryk:** depressed refugee, warned about radioactive dust storm, can be recurring truth-teller NPC.

Antagonists and infiltrators

- **Grayson:** traitor, sabotage driven by hazing resentment and hatred of higher-ups.
- **Shauna:** FOAK agent, radicalized, placed to topple FPD from inside.
- **Earth First “Green” network:** deniable operators, letters with missions, elimination protocols.

Wildcards and leverage

- **Beebe:** gun shop owner, motivation is family safety, knows about a firearm manufacturer (Camdon Defense) past Pala and can be pressured, bribed, protected, or broken.
 - **Bonner:** ex-Green, wants revenge on Earth First for firing him and hunting him.
 - **Zelma De Klerk:** scavenger for tech, almost executed by Green.
 - **Chacol “Chase” Avila:** stranger-facing alias “Chase,” tied to Hero, capable of ambush and desperate moves.
 - **Hero:** the only alien, reactor tech origin, needs core to leave, promises the alien blaster “Hamburger Helper” as reward.
-

Key locations and what they mean in play

Disaster sites

- **San Onofre Explosion:** a radioactive myth landmark, also a navigation hazard.
- **Salton Sea Project Malfunction:** inland radiation and bad dreams, good for rumor arcs.

- **Lake Elsinore Explosion:** fallout shaping northern movement fears.

Power and authority nodes

- **Camp Pendleton North:** Guard presence, potential future stabilizer.
- **Camp Pendleton South:** airstrip destroyed, symbol of “we can’t fly out.”
- **FPD HQ and detention:** law center, political hub.
- **FRN base:** tech sanctuary, moral testing ground.

FOAK infrastructure

- **FOAK HQ (De Luz Rd):** extremist core.
- **Oceanside FOAK location (Vandegrift):** burned out, proof they can be hit.

Earth First nodes

- **Radioman site:** signal and logistics weirdness.
- **Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve center:** ecological horror potential, staging grounds.

Sunrise Project Biomass Center

Bathroom facade, locked stall, toilet flush triggers rotating wall, foot pads elevator, 2 floors. Removing the reactor or shutting vents causes orange mist containment failures because ventilation and containment are intertwined.

GM use: It’s a perfect “heist horror dungeon” with an escape timer.

Current campaign state, the “now”

- Lin is trusted but still scrutinized by FPD after internal betrayal and investigation.
 - Grayson and Shauna are held, banishment is being considered, capital punishment pressure rises.
 - FRN has the Biomass Reactor, Earth First will notice and attempt recovery or destruction.
 - If Lin steals it back and gives it to Hero, Earth First stops targeting FRN specifically, and Lin gets “Hamburger Helper,” but Earth First pressure redirects onto Lin and any route to the desert gate.
-

Economy and scarcity rules (how the world behaves)

- **Ammo is scarce**, violence is avoided because people fear running out, that's why guns are power but also restraint.
 - **Manufacturing is the golden ticket**, Camdon Defense past Pala is the kind of knowledge that starts wars.
 - **Water is strategic**, FOAK targeting FPD's water is a legit "this month" crisis.
 - **Food comes from nurseries, farms, raids, and community kitchens**, whoever controls steady calories controls people.
-

Active clocks (run these like escalating consequences)

Clock A: Earth First virus completion (main clock)

- **25%**: weird sampling raids, targeted kidnappings, "Green" recruitment surges.
- **50%**: more animal courier activity, more disappearances, more "contained zones" guarded.
- **75%**: prototype deployment tests in micro-zones, sudden local outbreaks, fake "accidents."
- **100%**: launch attempt, mass-delivery plan begins, regionwide panic.

Clock B: Calaveras road takeover (15 and 76)

- **25%**: soft tolls, "security inspections," polite intimidation.
- **50%**: checkpoints harden, Rainbow skirmishes intensify.
- **75%**: forced recruitment, prisoner collection, FPD provocations.
- **100%**: CM dictates trade, food, and movement, open conflict with FPD becomes inevitable.

Clock C: FOAK water theft attempt

- **25%**: scouting, propaganda blaming FPD for shortages.
- **50%**: sabotage tries, infiltration, slave labor pushed to expand water hauling.
- **75%**: direct raids on water points, hostage threats.
- **100%**: water crisis, FPD legitimacy test, civil unrest.

Clock D: Christian Fellowship fracture

- **25%**: sermons shift, whisper campaigns, FOAK defectors gain influence.
 - **50%**: segregation pressure, "true believers" committees form.
 - **75%**: internal violence or staged "miracles," kids used as leverage.
 - **100%**: schism, mass exodus, or FOAK capture by conversion.
-

Encounter design rules that keep your world consistent

The road always costs something

Any long travel should cost at least one of: time, fuel, ammo, goodwill, supplies, or secrecy.

Keep weird concentrated

Use 80/20: 80% human conflict, 20% concentrated horror sci-fi zones like Sunrise, Earth First reserve areas, and van disappearance corridors.

Bio-Munchers as attrition and timers

They work best when the real threat is not just their damage, it's:

- your fire resources running low,
 - someone starting to change,
 - the team being forced to choose between saving someone and escaping.
-

Ready-to-run plot engines (no prep beyond names)

1. **Water war spark:** FOAK hits a minor water point, FPD must respond without leaving itself open.
2. **CM “protection offer”:** CM offers FPD a “mutual checkpoint agreement” that is actually a trap.
3. **Fellowship schooling crisis:** kids get sick, they need FRN meds, but Fellowship refuses FRN “godless tech” unless Lin brokers.
4. **Beebe squeeze:** CM demands exclusivity, FOAK threatens him, FPD wants neutrality, Beebe is cracking.
5. **Camdon rumor leak:** someone mentions manufacturing past Pala, now three factions want it, and Pala clamps down.
6. **Green recruitment raid:** Earth First snatches a desperate survivor, leaving a letter message in an animal-delivered drop.
7. **Sunrise relapse:** orange mist lingers somewhere unexpected, Bio-Munchers appear in a “normal” neighborhood.
8. **Raiders’ “trade day”:** Rolling Hills hosts a market day, but “murder Danny” rumors spike the night before.
9. **Banishment dilemma:** Grayson and Shauna sentencing divides FPD and community, riots threaten the thin peace.
10. **Hero deadline:** ship departure window approaches, Chase gets desperate, forces the handoff to happen now.

How to portray each faction at the table (fast voice notes)

- **FPD:** exhausted professionalism, clipped radio talk, moral fatigue.
- **FRN:** anxious competence, generators hum, clipboards, quiet fear of compromise.
- **FOAK:** loud bravado, brittle courage, cruelty as performance, fear of pain.
- **CM:** calm smiles, business language, violent consequences spoken softly.
- **Fellowship:** warm hospitality with sharp edges, fear wrapped in scripture.
- **Raiders:** suburb cosplay, unsettling politeness, sudden brutality outside the walls.
- **Earth First:** absence that feels present, animal signs, vans, letters, “you were never alone.”