

## THE LAST OF THE NOMADS

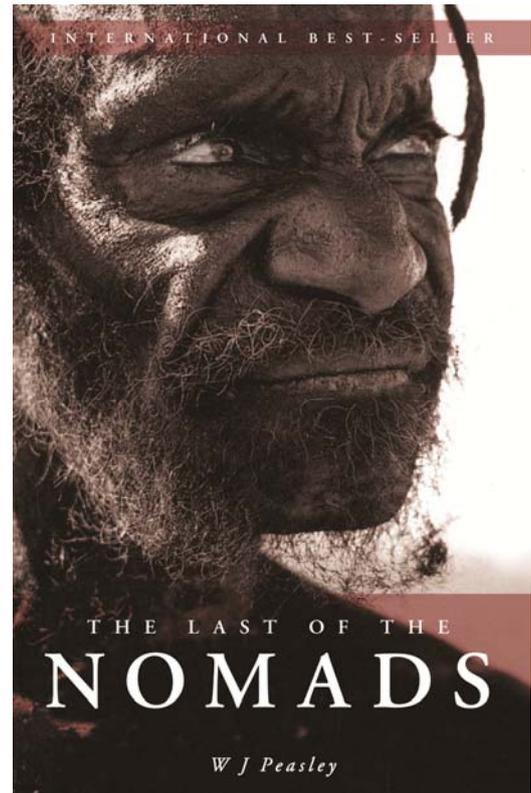
W.J. PEASLEY, AM

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Set in the 1970s, *The Last of the Nomads* is a journey into the Western Gibson Desert. W.J. Peasley, AM and his companions are guided by Mudjon to find the last of the Mandildjara people, Warri and Yattungka.

The relationship between Warri and Yattungka breaches kinship laws. The retribution they face, coupled with their deep connection to the land, means they have chosen to live alone in the desert for many years.

Peasley recounts each stage of the journey in searching for and bringing Warri and Yattungka back to Wiluna. The book debates whether this journey is necessary or worthwhile. The ageing couple live alone in drought-affected country, and appear to be both *[i]ll and emaciated* (p.7). The community in Wiluna has forgiven their relationship and is willing to accept the couple's return. However, as Peasley reflects, *[w]e will never know whether they were happy at Wiluna* (p.164). What constitutes the 'better' life for Warri and Yattungka? What is the value of longevity when balanced against their severance from country?



A story that begins as a rescue mission into the Gibson Desert becomes a philosophical journey for characters and readers alike.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W.J. Peasley AM was born and raised in New South Wales where he worked on the family farm. Following a period in the army, he studied medicine at the University of Sydney. His interests include history, anthropology and indigenous sacred rites.

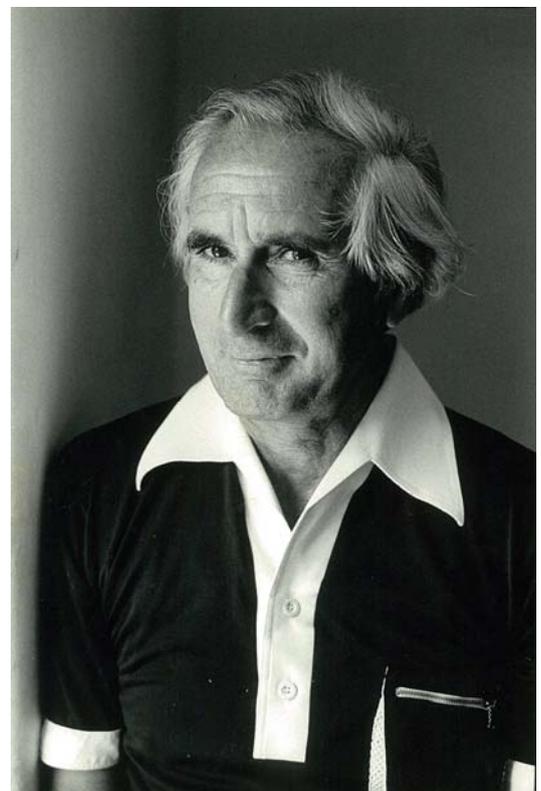
### QUESTIONS

1. *Mudjon of the Mandildjara is one of the elders engaged in the task of bringing his people back to their traditional beliefs and away from the world of white man, a world which many of the desert people cannot fully comprehend ...* (p.34)

What do we learn of the culture of the *Mandildjara* people, and their connection to land? In what ways has this community resisted the imposition of white culture?

2. *One presumed that the owner of the pitji was a woman, for it was a woman's work to collect the seed.* (p.73)

What are some of the practices and tools used by the *Mandildjara* people? Is labour in their community a gendered activity?



3. How does the book depict Yatungka and Warri? Does their behaviour conform to the traditional gender roles of the *Mandildjara*?
4. What is the purpose of the *Mandildjara* kinship law? How have Warri and Yatungka breached it?
5. How does Mudjon *read* and relate to the land? How does this assist in his search for Warri and Yatungka?
6. The Western Gibson Desert functions as another character in this text. How does this depiction help the reader to understand the importance of country to the *Mandildjara* people?
7. *In response to ... whether this may be 'secret business' he replied, 'Might be', and did not wish to talk about the matter any further (p.111).*

In what way does Mudjon work to protect his culture?

8. What insight does Peasley gain from the process of 'rescuing' the 'last of the nomads' from the desert?
9. How does Peasley depict the relationship between time and place? What role does memory play in this book?
10. What physical and emotional challenges do each of the participants face in their journey into and out of the desert?
11. *'Perhaps we will never know whether they were happy at Wiluna. We do know, however, that they lived more than a year longer than if they had remained at Ngarinarri.'*

Do you think that Peasley and his companions were right to bring Warri and Yatungka to Wiluna?

12. How does their story relate to the much bigger story of the impact of white colonisation on Aboriginal Australian