

DAEMORNIA NOVACASTRIA



A DAEMORNIA SUPPLEMENT

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Illustrated by Steve Messenger

Daemornia Studios
Presents

‘Novacastria’

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Patrick Taylor:

Thanks to Michael Lirko for creating an amazing new world and giving me the chance to expand upon it, and to Steve Messenger for filling in the vision with his awesome artwork. A big hello to all my friends in 'Newy', and I hope you can forgive me for what I've done to your city... Go the Knights!

Steve Messenger:

I'd like to thank all of my friends and critics,
and God, who has allowed me to have my talent.

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NOVACASTRIA

Novacastria (*No-var-cas-tree-ar*)

Nova - adj. Latin *New*

Castria – noun. Latin *Castle*



Why should I read this?

This book describes Novacastria – a city reborn from the devastation that was the Daemornia!

Using the material in this book you can build a Daemornia campaign on Earth, where the forces of humanity are starting to reach out and discover what has happened to their world in the dark decades before. They will be in for some surprises.

The material presented is 'human-centric', but Offworlders are present and very active in Novacastria, and GMs should encourage their players to bring such 'new blood' into their campaign.

As well as the city of Novacastria, the surrounding environs are detailed, and everything you read will have clues and hooks that lead to adventure.

A pivotal concept in the material is the relationship between Daemonic magic, and Gurri magic. The Gurri (Australian aboriginals) have an ancient mythology, steeped in magic that appears even older than that of the Daemons, and is likewise rooted in primal energies.

Not every outcome in this book is set in stone – the various possibilities are described, and the GM and players can choose which path their campaign will take. Will subterfuge and cunning be the order of the day, or will strength-of-arms see the players through? The choice is yours.

“Fluff”

This book is all “fluff”, which is a good thing.

It means that the book contains 100% useful background material, character descriptions, and atmosphere. There isn't a single game mechanic - only ideas, plot hooks, adventure seeds, and inspiration!

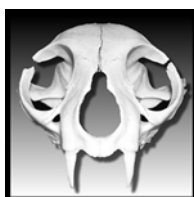
When a game designer starts putting down statistics a game world starts to ‘freeze’ in time and place. If a non-player character has ‘X’ statistics at time ‘Y’, what happens if the players don't meet them until a week later? Or a month? Or a year? Of course that non-player character will change, maybe even cease to exist, hence the statistics become almost pointless in a sourcebook (please note that I said ‘sourcebook’, and not ‘adventure’ or ‘module’).

Another problem with written statistics is that most groups use one or more ‘house rules’, which can easily make or break official rules, and which no sourcebook can hope to deal with. On top of that, official rules changes, make writing for one particular version of the rules too risky.

Last of all, a book that is completely lacking in “crunch” is easy to read, and can portray a more enjoyable and streamlined set of ideas. Participants in the story are not forced to perform certain actions because the logic of statistics dictates that they would have the most favourable outcome. Hopefully the emphasis on “fluff” will enable you to build more enjoyable, interactive games, where characterisation and player input are the focus of your adventures. Enjoy!

‘Skulls’

Although this book does not quantify the people and situations described within in terms of game mechanics, they are rated relative to the players.



Daemon Skull



Human Skull



Power



Secret

NATURE rating is measured in Skulls on a scale of 0 to 5. Daemon Skulls reflect aggressive behaviour. Human Skulls reflect a positive or friendly behaviour. The more Skulls, the stronger the behaviour.

Remember that NATURE can work relative to the personalities of the player characters. Aggressive characters will be more acceptable to other aggressive characters, and vice-versa.

POWER rating is measured in Swords on a scale of 0 to 5. This corresponds to either physical, magical, or psychic combat and destructive abilities in question. Zero Swords means that the person or creature in question is incapable of direct violence.

Note that POWER ratings are relative to your players – and anything more powerful or weaker than your characters will have a correspondingly more difficult or easier time dealing with each situation. A rating of 3 Swords means that the creature in question should be level with your player's abilities.

SECRET ratings are measured in ‘?’ on a scale of 0 to 5. This indicates how well connected a character is, or how many game secrets they know.

HISTORY & BACKDROP

The events in this section relate to the formation of the continent of Australia, its early inhabitants and its European settlement, and the establishment of the city of Newcastle and it's renaming to Novacastria.

Knowing this history will give you an insight into how the local characters think and act, and what they hold as important. It also sets the tone for codes of behaviour (written and unwritten) and gives the GM an idea of how non-player characters react to outsiders.

You should also refer to the maps within this book to familiarise yourself with the geography of the campaign, and to 'Speaking the Lingo' for a description of the dialect of English spoken in Australia, should you want to get a feel for the way Australian's speak, and why.

Gondwana to Aboriginal

650 Million Years ago the seas were shallow and teemed with life – many forms of which have now become extinct. At this time, Australia belonged to a 'super-continent' called Gondwana, along with Africa, India and South America.

Although Gondwana began to break apart over 100 Million years ago, the seeds of a common ancestry had literally been sown – to this day the separate continents still share a common plant and animal heritage.

However, of all the continents that belonged to Gondwana only in Australia, due to its isolation, has the survival of some of the most unusual creatures been possible.

Most of these were mammals, defined by having hair, producing milk, having a breathing diaphragm, sweat-glands, and an articulate dentary bone (jaw bone).

Along with the more well known animals – kangaroo, emu, wombat, platypus, and koala – a host of other exotic creatures also survive, notably the 'mega mammals'.

THE 'MEGA-FAUNA'

During this period Australia spawned a host of incredible creatures – the Yingabalanara, Borhyaenidae, the world's first venomous snakes, Illariids and Wynyardiids, Nimbados, and enormous crocodiles! Many of these animals flourished, and of the more unusual creatures thought to have become extinct around 40-60,000 years ago, pockets of prehistoric survivors continue to be found well into the modern age.

With the onset of the Daemornia these species began to reappear, either as a by-product of the magical energies that have returned to the world, or perhaps deliberately returned by someone unknown. Whatever is the case, they make life in Australia more dangerous than ever.

Propleopus: the giant carnivorous kangaroo.

Palorchestes: a powerful clawed mammal the size of a horse.

Wakaleo: the 'marsupial lion', with more biting power than a Fel-Sharg!

Obdurodon: the largest platypus ever discovered, with poisonous spurs and a duck bill!

Diprotodons: fanged, wombat like creatures, the largest marsupial known to exist.

Thingodontans: tree-dwelling herbivores, with the fangs of a carnivore.

Thylacine: also known as the 'Tasmania Tiger', one of the most aggressive animals in existence.

Dasyures: small cat like predators, with large eyes, snouts, and long tails.

Aboriginal to Colonial

60,000 Years Ago

Estimates put the first colonisation of the 'unknown southern land' by the ancestors of the Australian aborigines as starting anywhere from 40,000 to 60,000 years before the Daemornia.

20,000 Years Ago

Aboriginal people were well established throughout coastal and mainland Australia and Tasmania, with successive waves of Aboriginal settlers pushing the earlier inhabitants further and further south.

16,000 Years Ago

Around 16,000 years ago the sea levels began to rise as the ice caps melted. Eventually the land bridges between mainland Australia and Tasmania became flooded, and Tasmanian Aborigines remained isolated for the next 12,000 years.

8,000 Years Ago

Continued rising of sea levels created the Torres Strait Islands, as the land bridge between Australia and New Guinea was flooded. Afterward the coastline of Australia became fixed in the way that it exists today.

5,000 Years Ago

The Dingo, the native dog of Australia, arrived. It was most likely transported across the Torres Strait by a new wave of settlers. The Dingo thrived in Australia and adapted extremely well to the dry and inhospitable conditions that continue to develop.

Aboriginal belief in a creator spirit known as the 'Rainbow Serpent' was born, and this belief continues today, making it the most enduring (human) belief system that has ever existed.

0 AD

Aboriginal cultural boundaries were well established, and although the technological level of Aboriginal society rose only very slowly, the concepts of language and culture were well-developed and ran deep with spiritual beliefs and a timeless connection to the earth.

Aboriginal land-management techniques, such as clearing the land with fire, shared responsibility for transforming the once tropical and green 'Gondwana' landscape into a dry and desolate land.

In the area that will become Newcastle and later Novacastria, the Awakabal Aborigines were the dominant group, bounded to the north by the Worimi people of Port Stephens, and to the west by the Wonnaru people of the Hunter Valley.

1500 AD

Indonesian fishermen visited northern Australia. Aboriginal people across Australia's north coast remained in contact with Macassan fishermen from south-east Asia.

1606 AD

Dutchman Willem Jansz and his ship Duyfken explored the western coast of Cape York Peninsula, and were the first Europeans to have contact with Aboriginal people. There were violent clashes between the two groups.

1770 AD

On April 29 Captain James Cook in the H.M.S. Endeavour entered Botany Bay. After an encounter with local Aborigines in Botany Bay Cook wrote "all they seem'd to want was us to be gone".

Cook claimed the eastern coast of the continent in the name of King George III of England on August 22nd at Possession Island, naming eastern Australia 'New South Wales'.

The southern land was declared terra nullius by the English government, denoting a land 'devoid of civilised society'. This was a legal concept that allowed European colonial powers to take control of "empty" territory that none of the other European colonial powers had yet claimed.

1788 AD

On the 18th of January 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip entered Botany Bay with a total of eleven ships, transporting convicts, soldiers, and settlers, and with orders to build a penal colony. After a short period Phillip re-located the fleet to Camp Cove in Sydney harbour, known as 'Cadi' to the native Cadigal peoples, narrowly beating two French vessels that arrived only days later.

Colonial to Modern

1789 AD

April, smallpox decimated the Aboriginal population of Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay. The disease spread inland and along the coast.

November, Governor Phillip captured two Aboriginal men - Bennelong and Colebee. Colebee escaped but Bennelong was kept at Government House for five months.

Bennelong and a boy named Yemmerrawanie were taken to England by Phillip, where Bennelong met King George III. Yemmerrawanie died in England, and in 1795 Bennelong returned to Australia.

1794 AD

Governor Hunter was appointed as the second Governor of New South Wales. He struggled courageously against both the conditions and the organised crime that had taken hold of the colonial marine forces. He was influential in encouraging the exploration of land in the colony, and in reigning in the powers of the military. Of his time in the colony, Hunter wrote that he "could not have had less comfort, although he would certainly have had greater peace of mind, had he spent the time in a penitentiary". The Hunter Valley was later named in his honour.

HISTORY & BACKDROP

1799 AD

During the reign of Governor Hunter two Aboriginal boys were killed by five settlers. A court martial found the settlers guilty but referred sentencing to the Secretary of State for Colonies in England, and the men were released on bail. Governor Hunter was recalled after this, and acting-Governor King was instructed to pardon the men.

Thus began a six-year period of resistance to white settlement by Aborigines in the Hawkesbury and Parramatta areas, known as the 'Black Wars'.

1819 AD

English colonies rapidly expanded into present day Queensland. A penal settlement was set up at Redcliffe, but moved to present day Brisbane three months later. Colonists spread west of the Blue Mountains and established cattle and farming stations.

1830 AD

This year marked the beginning of the Black Wars in the state of Tasmania. Governor Arthur tried unsuccessfully to drive all the remaining Aboriginal people in eastern "Van Diemens Land" on to the Tasman Peninsula, employing over two thousand men to form a 'Black Line' that scoured the countryside. The entire venture cost 5000 pounds (a fortune at the time) and only two Aboriginal people were caught - an old man and a young boy.

1835 AD

John Bateman attempted to make a 'treaty' with Aboriginal people for Port Phillip Bay, near present day Melbourne, by 'buying' two-hundred thousand hectares with 20 pairs of blankets, 30 tomahawks, and various other articles and a yearly tribute. Governor Bourke refused to recognise the 'treaty' and the purchase was made void. This was the only time colonists attempted to sign a treaty for land with Aboriginal owners.

1838 AD

A police-force, mostly European volunteers, set out in response to conflict on the Liverpool Plains, north central NSW. At a site called 'Slaughterhouse Creek', over sixty Aborigines were killed. The only European casualty was a corporal, speared in the leg.

In response, the "Faithful Massacre" at Owens Creek occurred, and the state of Victoria saw ten Europeans killed by Aboriginal people.

'The Bushwhack' or 'The Drive', against Aborigines, was initiated by squatters and their stockmen to clear the Myall Creek area, north of the settlement at Newcastle, and the 'Myall Creek Massacre' occurred. Twelve heavily armed colonists rounded up and brutally killed 28 Aborigines as payback for the killing of several hut keepers and shepherds. Afterward, seven Europeans were charged with murder, found guilty, and hanged. After this black-white conflict began to die down and eventually ended.

1901 AD

Australia became a nation when the six self-governing colonies, now states, united in 1901. Before this, the colonies were politically separate, with their own laws and parliaments.

During the long political process that led to Federation, a stronger sense of Australian nationalism developed.

The Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated on 1st January 1901 in Centennial Park, Sydney.

The decision to Federate caused great concern at the time, but was later hailed as an act of great political insight and selflessness.

1914 AD

From 1914 to 1918, Australian troops fought in Europe during World War I.

1929 AD

The 'Great Depression' engulfed the world, spreading outward from the tightening of finance that suddenly gripped the New York Stock Exchange. Just like in the USA, in Australia privately owned banks controlled monetary policy and the government relied heavily on borrowing money from other countries. When the banks refused to extend overdrafts, the Commonwealth government had no choice but to begin selling off gold reserves.

After the crash, unemployment in Australia, which had been at around 10%, more than doubled to 21% by mid-1930, and reached its peak in mid-1932 when almost 32% of Australians were out of work.

No greater devastation of the social fabric of the country was to happen again until the Daemornia, yet out of the darkness was born one of the traits that Australians prize dearly - a sense of responsibility (both personal and political) for their fellow Australians. This was the dawn of enlightened unemployment support, social welfare schemes, and relief works by the government.

The ruling Labor government was unable to bring relief from the Great Depression, and by the time the government was voted out of office Australia had felt the effects of the economic disaster more than most other nations of the world.

1930 AD

Aborigines and Japanese fishing boats clashed on the coast of Arnhem Land. Several Japanese were fatally speared.

1939 AD

From 1939 to 1945 Australian troops fought in Europe, Africa, and the Pacific during World War II.

1942 AD

The state capital of Darwin was bombed by the Japanese during WWII. In Arnhem Land (northern Australia) Aboriginal people made up special reconnaissance units in defence against the Japanese.

1953 AD

Nuclear blasts were conducted by the British military on Maralinga lands in South Australia. They were code named Operation Totem. Afterward a black cloud passed over Aboriginal lands and many people suffered radiation sickness, as did Australian Army servicemen subjected to the blast.

1962 AD

The Commonwealth Electoral Act was amended to give the vote to all Aboriginal people.

1965 AD

Integration Policy was introduced, meaning that Aboriginal people were supposed to have more control over their life and society.

Northern Territory patrol officers 'brought in' the last group of Aboriginal people - the Pintubi people - who were living an independent life in the desert.

1967 AD

A Commonwealth Referendum passed that ended constitutional discrimination, and all Aboriginal people were then after counted in the national census.

1969 AD

The Federal Government established the National Aboriginal Sports Foundation to help finance sports activities and foster Aboriginal athletes.

1972 AD

The 'Aboriginal Tent Embassy' was pitched outside Parliament House in Canberra, demonstrating for land rights.

1980 AD

The Pitjantjatjara Council advised the Aboriginal Affairs Minister of the possible radioactive contamination of Aboriginal people at Wallatinna Station, in South Australia, resulting from atomic tests.

The 'Black Mist' of 1953 was brought to public attention with symptoms of sight loss and skin rashes being reported. A number of Aboriginal people died as a result of the British atomic tests, and up to 1,000 were directly affected.

Since the Daemornia, sightings of 'Black Mist' have increased dramatically, as a direct result of the use of nuclear weapons against the forces of Erebus.

1981 AD

Asian immigration increased markedly in Australia. Initial migrants are from Vietnam, but the trend shifted towards Japanese and then Chinese migrants. By the end of the millennium Australia would grow from almost zero to an almost 10% Asian population, based in Sydney and the other capital cities.

1985 AD

Uluru (aka. Ayer's Rock) in Alice Springs was handed back to the traditional Gurri owners in an official ceremony. Tourists were discouraged from climbing the sacred monument, but Aboriginal elders decided not to prevent them from doing so.

1992 AD

The High Court of Australia ruled in the Mabo case that native (Aboriginal) title existed over particular kinds of lands, namely 'unalienated' Crown Lands, national parks and reserves - and that Australia never was terra nullius or 'empty land' as the British had declared over two-hundred years ago.

1999 AD

After years of promotion and discussion a referendum to change the nation from a Constitutional Monarchy to a Republic was resoundingly defeated by the Australian people. Many analysts declare that the vote was lost because the proposal concentrated too much power in the hands of the politicians and the wealthy.

Post-modern

In the post-modern period Newcastle was the 'gateway to the Hunter Valley', in New South Wales, the most prosperous state of Australia. Before the Daemornia the city was an economic power house, with notable socialist political leanings, and a world-class university that taught both Engineering and Medicine.

The populace had survived the economic slump of the 1980's, which included the closing of the steel-works that employed around 20,000 people, and re-invented the city as a showcase of what people can accomplish in the face of adversity.

Newcastle became a centre for medical research, boutique steel mills, and the country's first foray into commercial wind-generated electricity. It was also the first Australian city to have wireless broadband coverage, and it boasted an infrastructure superior to many of the capital cities.

Incursion

Newcastle was by-and-large overlooked during the days of the Incursion. The city became a haven for those fleeing from Sydney, but fear of the Great Plague forced the Newcastle city leaders to build the 'Wall' and turn away refugees and bandits alike. It is not a period of history that the city was proud of, but it did ensure that it stayed intact and was not overrun and pulled apart by looters. Unfortunately the policy of exclusion did not prevent the Plague from reaching most of the people of Newcastle.

The re-awakening of magic drew many Gurri elders to the area, often for reasons they could not understand or explain, and the number of Gurri in the region expanded, as many Gurri were able to by-pass the Wall or survive in the outlying bush.

Daemornia

Sydney and Melbourne were the cities most fiercely attacked by the Daemonic hordes during the Daemornia. Melbourne fell completely to the Daemons, and was later renamed Nathrad when the Traitor Daemons liberated it and settled there.

When the Daemons advanced on Newcastle, most of the citizens fled throughout the Hunter Valley and into the Blue Mountains. The remnants of the city were enslaved, and most of the established towns in the Hunter valley were obliterated.

The only resistance offered to the Daemons came from the air force base at Williamtown, 20 kilometres north of Newcastle, in a brief but futile attack on the swarms of flying Daemons that circled the city.

In the time it took the Reptilians and Traitor Daemons to arrive with help, the city had been turned into a nightmare, particularly the hospital and steelworks, and the university district where the Daemons performed their experiments on living human subjects. History tells that the Judges of Hades came to witness some of the unholy acts performed during this time.

Yet while the Daemons played, the human survivors gathered. Remnants of the army that managed to escape Sydney, mainly mechanized infantry, rendezvoused with infantry and light-armour divisions from Singleton, in the north west of the Hunter. The arrival of Traitor Daemons from their conquest of Nathrad signalled the start of a counter-attack. The Traitor Daemons were joined by the remaining military forces, as well as the surrounding Gurri shaman and warriors, who had become powerful with magic since the Daemornia began.

Eventually the forces of Erebos were slain, unable to retreat past the sea, although a few managed to escape into the bush and continued to terrorize the area.

Although most of the population of around one million was enslaved and/or killed by the Daemons, over thirty thousand people lived to see the city liberated. To commemorate the event and acknowledge their desire for a fresh start, the city was renamed – "Novacastria".

The number of humans and other races now living in Novacastria has grown dramatically in recent years, although no city Council has attempted a proper census count.

Aboriginal Myths & Legends

The Ngalyod, 'Bunyip'

It is possible that the myth of the Ngalyod was based on sightings of the last surviving Diprotodonts of the ancient world.

Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia had stories about monsters that lived in the water. The Ngalyod was an enormous animal that killed and ate people. It made loud, bellowing noises at night. Its huge fur-covered body had a long neck. It reproduced by laying huge eggs near the water.

Some European explorers also reported Ngalyods. One of these was the famous explorer Hamilton Hume who, in 1821, wrote about a monster that lived in Lake Bathurst in New South Wales.

Since the Daemornia, loud noises bellowing at night have been a regular feature of the Hunter Valley and although no actual sighting of a Ngalyod has ever been reported, caravans and travellers that camp outside of established towns often go missing.

Tiddalik

Tiddalik was a giant frog in the Creation era that lived in the Wollombi Valley (in the Hunter) who was overcome by a great thirst. He began to satisfy this thirst by drinking from the Wollombi Brook, but instead of drinking only his fill, he continued to gulp the water, not caring for the needs of others.

The result was that he was full to the point where his stomach was near bursting and he could only move a short way away from what had now become an empty, dry stream. The other animals quickly became alarmed at the loss of water and realised that they would have to get Tiddalik to bring some of the water back up. If he did not they knew that all the living creatures would die.

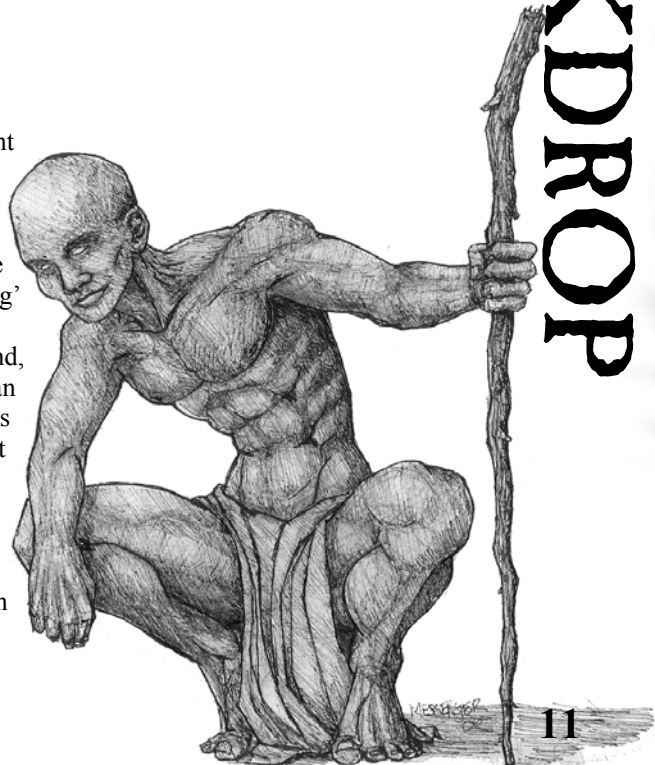
The animals eventually made Tiddalik laugh and in doing so he brought the water back up. All the living creatures could now survive and enjoy life once more. The gods punished Tiddalik for his greed and turned him into a giant stone statue, as a reminder that greed and neglecting the needs of others can lead us to suffer in the same way that Tiddalik still does.

Biame

Biame was one of the great Gurri (Awakabal equivalent of 'Koori') ancestral beings of the Dreamtime, which was the time of the gods and spirits before mankind was born. His presence was felt throughout many South-Eastern Indigenous Australian communities and his journeys were recorded in song, dance, art, oral histories, and at 'Dreaming' sites.

During the later Dreamtime he moved across the land, helping develop the landscape and giving life and law to man and other aspects of the environment. When his journey was complete Biame returned to the sky but appeared at different times to remind Gurri peoples of the law.

Early Europeans recognised the revered status Biame held in Gurri lore and equated him with their Christian God. Post-Daemornia historians and culturalists continue to debate whether Biame was an Offworlder, although Aborigines reject this hypothesis.



AN AERIAL VIEW

The map of Novacastria and surrounding environs highlights the waterline (both coastal and river) and the major roads. Localities referred to in this book are clearly marked, as are significant features.

Areas inside the Wall are considered 'safe' inhabited regions, with established houses and businesses. It is safe to move around these areas night and day, and the crime rate is low.

Areas outside the Wall are dangerous places to be. There are two other dangerous areas inside the city. The first is Mayfield, a mass of shantytowns where life is cheap and one wrong move can be your last. The second is the abandoned steelmills, which is without a doubt the epicentre of Daemonic activity in Novacastria, although the true extent of that activity has yet to be discovered.

The Wall

The Wall runs from the Hexham Swamp, south through Walls-end where the road to Sydney begins, and east across to Adamstown where the old transmitter tower sits as the most recognisable landmark of the city. The Wall itself is easily visible from far away, and is always being expanded by successive Civic Councils. Its purpose is to control traffic from the south, and protect the city from creatures that have become known as 'The people beyond the Wall' – inhuman 'muties' or degenerate Daemons, no one is entirely sure!

The Harbour

Novacastria harbour is a fully functioning industrial, commercial, and fishing harbour, one of the few deep water harbours on the Australian coast. The harbour is protected by a gigantic Sea-net that keeps Daemonic beasts out, and the lighthouse is an extremely important maritime shipping signal.

The harbour is considered a safe place to swim, at least near the shipyard and the main wharves, and people swim there rather than risk the ocean waters of the city beaches.

During the Daemornia dozens of large ships were sunk in the harbour, including several coal ships, the destroyer HMAS Sturt, and the aircraft carrier USS Boxer (sole survivor of a fleet that had been defeated by General Kaol off Hawaii, and had limped into Newcastle harbour only days before the city was overrun). These wrecks dominate the northern side of the harbour – they are also haunted and strange figures move about them at night.

The Hunter Valley

The Hunter valley extends west from the Novacastria 'city limits' to the town of Muswelbrook, north to the Barrington Tops, and back east to Forster-Tuncurry on the coast. Because the 'valley' is simply any area bordered by the local hills, an actual definition of the area it covers is open to debate and speculation. The coastal areas that borders the valley are known as the 'Central Coast' by locals.

Sydney

Although much larger than Novacastria, Sydney has recently become a victim of its own reputation. Most of the city was razed by the Daemon hordes, but after their defeat the people returned in large numbers to a city no longer able to support them. Sydney's main value was always in commerce, which has now fallen behind trade and industry as the main creators of wealth, and being cut off from the resources of the Hunter Valley has also damaged the city's ability to rebuild. Vast ruins are scattered across the widely spread city, and they remain as breeding-grounds for Daemons and reavers alike.

The old Sydney-Melbourne rivalry that used to exist has now been replaced with Sydney-Novacastria rivalry, which is played out on the Bladehockey field – and in the back-rooms of politics.

The Hunter River

The Hunter River flows south from the Barrington Tops watershed, through an area colloquially known as 'Hunter River Country', to Sandgate in Novacastria, and thence to the sea. The water is brackish a long way inland, and although it is drinkable, Bull Sharks often cruise the river, claiming unwary swimmers and livestock alike.

Although the riverboats can navigate the Hunter-Karuah connection and travel up the Karuah River to Thunderbolts Way, they can only make it fraction of the way up the Hunter River towards Singleton, due to both the speed of the Hunter River and its frequent rapids.

The Southern Wastes

Southwest of Novacastria, starting from Walls-End, is an inland strip of land known simply as 'the wastes', which is the home of 'the people beyond the Wall'. The wastes extend west beyond the Blue Mountains, but peter out as they approach the Hawkesbury river on the northern border of Sydney.

The Pacific Road

Formerly the National Pacific Highway, running the east coast of Australia, from Rockhampton in Queensland, through Brisbane, Novacastria, Sydney, and down to Melbourne in Victoria. The 'Highway' is now in absolute disarray, its long stretches of concrete crumbling, and nothing larger than a wagon can freely negotiate the entire length without having to stop to clear the road.

Stopping on the road for any reason is a bad idea, because highwaymen often try to ambush travellers, and anyone looking for work as a 'caravan guard' is guaranteed of seeing action. The only vehicles to make Novacastria-Sydney trips without incident are the wagon-convoys of touring Bladehockey teams, because no one is dumb enough to take on a team of Bladehockey players!

The North Coast

North of the Central Coast is the North Coast, which runs all the way to the Queensland border. It is the home of farmers, graziers, survivalists, and ferals. Agriculturally rich, and relatively unpopulated, it is the logical area for either Sydney or Novacastria to expand their power-base. Securing the waterways along the coast is the first step in reclaiming this area.

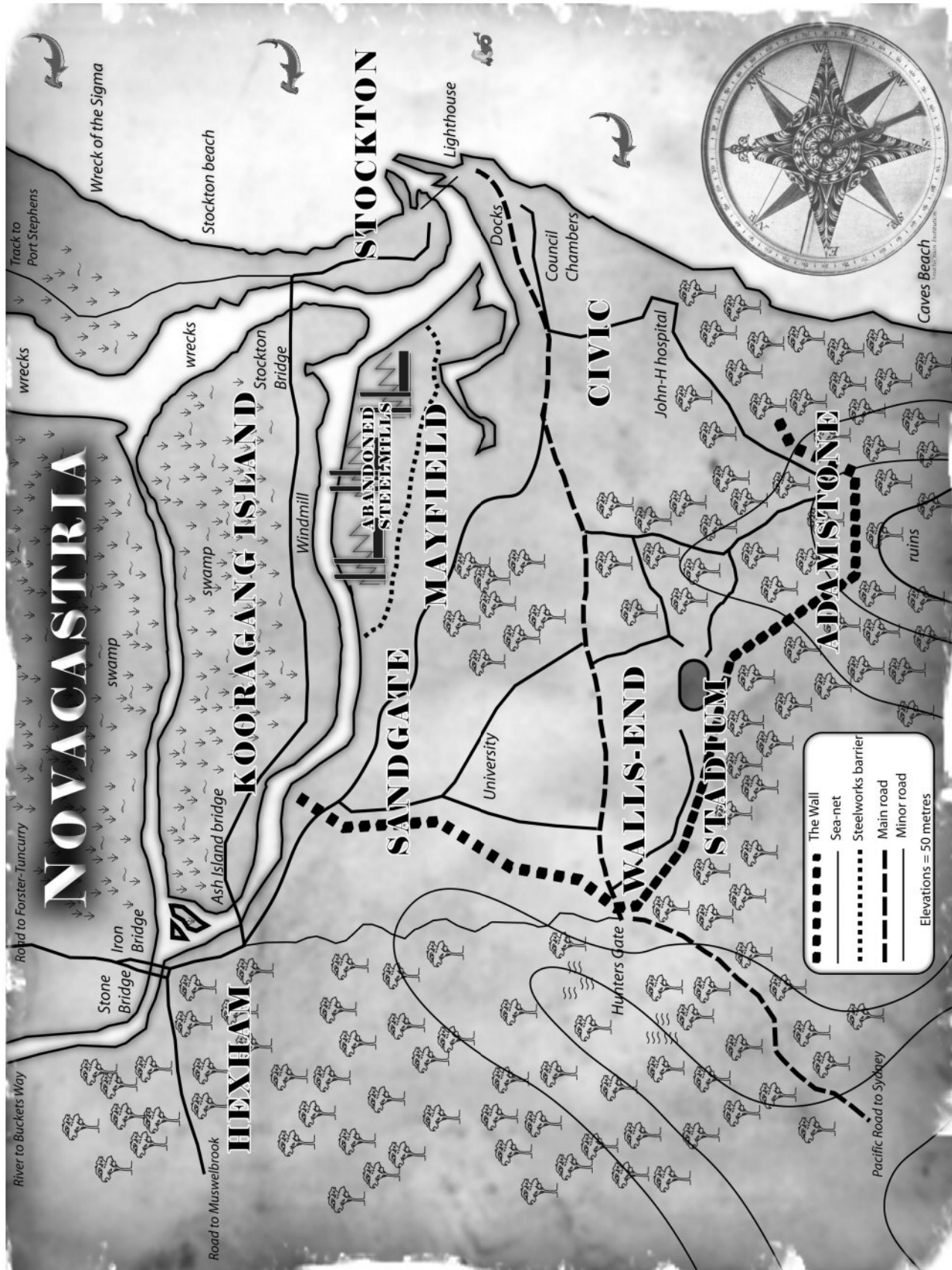
The Gold Coast

Beyond the North Coast is the Gold Coast, former haven of surfers and one of the jewels of Queensland. From a distance the ocean skyline now looks like crumbling black blocks, swarming with flies and gnats - unfortunately the skyscrapers that once offered luxury accommodation are now hives of lesser-Daemon activity that menace the surrounding area and into the North Coast. Rogrots and Nominods swarm between the buildings in their thousands, and while un-commanded they are no more than a dangerous nuisance, but if some evil force were to gather and direct them...

The Pacific Ocean

Home to thousands of shallow water coral atolls and Islands (known as Micronesia), as well as the deepest trench in the world (the Mariana Trench), the Pacific is highly navigable and is the backbone of intercontinental trade in the post-Daemornia world. It exhibits uniform trade-winds and wind patterns that make it appear welcoming, if the Daemonic sea-beasts can be overcome!

The surface current off Australia is dominated by a counter clockwise, cool-water circular pattern that runs south along the Australian coast. The worst weather condition that can be encountered for sailing is to run south down the coast, directly into a full 'southerly buster' - an icy cold wind that comes straight out of Antarctica! The best winds, depending on whether you want to go south or north respectively, are 'Nor'easters' that come out of the warm Pacific and 'Sou'westers' that come off the coast.



NOVACASTRIAN POLITICS

There are six major political forces in Novacastria. However, only the Centralist and Alliance factions compete for political control of the city's ruling Council. To complicate matters the supporters of Erebos (The Circle / Dark Circle), have plans that interfere with the machinations of all the other groups.

The Alliance

The broadest political contest being waged in Novacastria is between those who wish to form a coalition with the rebuilt Hunter valley townships, and those who simply want to take over the townships and merge them into a centrally-controlled greater Novacastria.

The Alliance consists not only of Novacastrians (people who live in Novacastria), but also of town leaders from throughout the Hunter valley who believe in sharing power and in self-rule for the townships. The philosophical mantra of the Alliance is that power breeds corruption, and "absolute power breeds absolute corruption" (George Orwell, 1984).

The success of the Alliance in achieving its aims lies in the ability of the townships to independently deal with problems they encounter. If the townships are perceived as weak, popular opinion will allow Centralist advocates to move in and literally take them over. Because it suits Daemonic interests for the valley to be controlled by an iron-fist from Novacastria, the members of the Alliance are often at odds with those who serve Erebos.

Centralists

The Centralists are a political faction dedicated to subjugating the entire Hunter Valley under the rule of the city of Novacastria, perhaps by force, but preferably by pressure and manipulation.

Centralists are not 'evil' in any sense of the word, and would probably be appalled to know that their greatest allies are followers of Erebos. Above all else the Centralists desire to bring law-and-order to the valley. Although it has members in the Civic Council, the majority of its support comes from the LEOs and related guardsmen. Most Centralists have decided that a show of military muscle is acceptable in achieving its objectives, but whether this should be extended into open warfare against other humans and humanoids is still hotly debated.

Sons of the Rebellion

The Sons of the Rebellion (aka 'The Sons') is a loose affiliation of individuals dedicated to the destruction of the followers of Erebos in the Hunter region. They are led by the Traitor Daemon J'Bai, who is also the top ranking local gladiator at the Stadium.

Although based on the beliefs of the Dankari and their struggle against Erebos, the shortage of Traitor Daemons in the city means that the group accepts any race – the only prerequisite is that they have a hatred of Erebos.

Highly chaotic in nature, the Sons are reactive rather than proactive, and while they will gladly respond to any attack or challenge, they do little in the way of investigation, which makes them a poor match for the wiles and deceptions of The Dark Circle.

Sons of the Rebellion aid each other with loans of equipment and magic, giving even the inexperienced an edge in combat versus Daemons. However, those who have political aspirations are often hamstrung by any relationship they might have with the Sons, because the public sees the group as little better than a bunch of violent anarchists, no matter how many Daemons they slay.

The Circle / Dark Circle

THE CIRCLE

The Circle is a semi-legitimate movement that encourages negotiation with the forces of Erebos to help reclaim the land. To the Circle the Daemons are not an absolute evil, but a tool that could help them.

Because of the possible link between Daemonic and Aboriginal magic, the Circle offers ready assistance to Ungawa (see below) although this is vehemently refused by the Gurri group.

THE DARK CIRCLE

Behind the scenes of the Circle, however, lies a sinister consortium of political and magical powers, dedicated to the service of Erebos and to bringing him to power over a new and restored Novacastria – ruled by them, in his stead of course. This group is known to its members only as The Dark Circle, which allows them to discuss “Circle” business fairly openly since most onlookers would believe them to be talking only about the publicly known Circle.

The focus of The Dark Circle is currently spread thin, and the group’s size is limited. They are endeavouring to use the abandoned steelmills as a breeding ground and marshalling area for slave Daemons. They stage attacks on the outlying townships in order to further the cause of the Centralists. They work within the shanty towns and the poorer districts, attempting to recruit bright and angry young minds to their cause. However, their most ambitious project is the construction of the Dark Temple of Erebos in the valley, as a gathering place and focus for their efforts, and a way to draw Erebos’ attention to Novacastria.

The Society for Magical Purity (‘Purity’)

The Society for Magical Purity is the well known public face for a ground that calls itself only ‘Purity’. While the Society acts as a respectable public service, voicing genuine concern over possible links between Aboriginal magic and Daemonic magic, the almost un-heard of core of the group is engaged in any activity that will bring down Gurri culture and magic.

The hardcore of Purity firmly believes that all Gurri magic is Daemonic, and they call it ‘Black Magic’ as both a description and a racist slur. Some members of Purity are followers of Erebos, but since even Erebos will not define any link between the Daemonic and Aboriginal magic, many of the Daemon’s followers actually view Purity as a regressive and backward organisation and subsequently avoid it.

The public face of the Society for Magical Purity is currently engaged in genuine research of the link between Gurri and Daemonic powers, and although the majority of the public members would be opposed to the hardcore beliefs of ‘Purity’, they are ignorant of its existence. When politics rears its ugly head, members of the Society often cite the inherent sexist nature of Gurri magic (see below) as another reason it should be regulated or banned.

Ungawa

Ungawa is a Gurri word loosely meaning ‘Courage’, and has been a Gurri war-cry for thousands of years. Ungawa accepts Gurri, part-Gurri, and non-Gurri members – anyone who is interested in learning about their spirit-god Biame and the Gurri magic.

The inner-sanctum of Ungawa is, however, closed to non-Gurri and to all females. It is this group of men that hunts down and confronts the Daemons of Erebos, leaving the investigation of rumours to the lay members.

Ungawa has not been able to clearly identify anyone associated with the hardcore Purity group, or The Dark Circle, but it strongly suspects that the organisations exist.

Ungawa insists that its male-dominance is necessary due to the nature of Gurri magic, in that it only fully responds to the male essence. This latent ‘sexism’ is the group’s biggest stumbling block, and is often exploited by its detractors.

Championing of Ungawa is done by Tjabuinji the gladiator, who fights at the Stadium.

LANDMARKS

Mayfield

Mayfield was the traditional residence of the steel workers, and the locality retained its blue-collar nature long after the steelmills were closed, despite many and varied attempts to gentrify the area. It is the closest locality to the abandoned works and rail yards, and any land approach to them will have to go through Mayfield. It is a grimy place, with plenty of industrial residue in the soil that gives off a faint petroleum smell. As the home of the shanty towns it is also the nosiest and most bustling place in Novacastria.

The Shanties

Rather than being one homogenous area, Mayfield is split into a dozen or so shantytowns, divided along the lines of old roads. Each shanty competes with the others to control the illegal activities that Mayfield is known for – prostitution, gambling, bootleg alcohol, black-market trade, and sometimes even slavery.

The shanties are so populated that the Civic council is hamstrung in their ability to act, because if the shanties were cleared out (or cleaned up) the tens of thousands of people there would simply leave and relocate to a more lucrative area.

There are no LEOs in Mayfield but plenty of local gangs, and the LEOs from Civic who do occasionally sweeps of the area always leave with the impression that it is better to keep the whole mess contained in the one area than risk any of it escaping.

Each shanty is ruled by a local 'warlord' who is invariably a proficient warrior, and who is backed up lowly shamans and magic users, and thousands of desperate and determined souls. Shanties are given colourful names that change with each new warlord, and generally along the lines of 'Whorestown', 'Plagueville', and 'Murderfield'.

The most common sorts of visitors to Mayfield are highly protected merchants and politicians engaging in a spot of 'slumming'. Distraught husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers can also be found scouring the shanties, if they have reason to believe that their loved one's might have been captured by shantytown slavers.

The singer-songwriter Lewis Drum (see Stroud) stays in the shanties when in Novacastria, and can be seen performing free of charge in public, often under the protection of one or more of the shantytown power brokers.

'Spin the Bottle'

Spin the bottle is a popular shantytown game in which contestants draw straws to see who goes first, and then they... spin the bottle. At all times that the bottle is spinning all contestants must have their hands (limbs?) palm down on the table.

As soon as the bottle stops spinning, the spinner will try to grab the bottle by the neck and smash it over the head of the person that the bottle pointed to when it stopped spinning. The person the bottle pointed to will try to grab the bottle first, to stop the spinner from smashing them!

If the bottle ends up pointing at the spinner, anyone can try to grab the bottle and smash anyone else! The ability to make the bottle stop exactly where you want it to is a valuable skill in this game.

Contestants ante-up to play, and the winner takes the pot. Players are disqualified if their hands leave the table too early, if they step away from the table, or if knocked unconscious. They are allowed to defend themselves against bottle attacks, and only one attack can be made per spin.

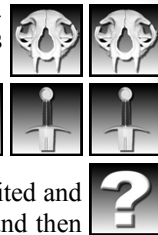
Spin the bottle is entertainment for common thugs, and has no ranking system. However, a small underground 'Spin-the-Knife' league exists in Murderville, although it is highly illegal and LEOs are always trying to close down the games. Underworld figures sometimes force those who cross them to 'play off' against their friends and loved ones in a game of Spin-the-Knife, with the winner being allowed to keep their life and the loser(s) forfeiting theirs.

LANDMARKS

Mayfield

The Warden of Murderfield

The current leader of Murderfield, the largest shanty, is the self-styled 'Warden'. He is a skilled fighter who wields a massive war-hammer, making full use of his mutated strength and animal-like ferocity. Newcomers to the shanty see 'The Warden' dressed in foppish finery, ruined by garbage stains and the filth of the shanties, combing his thinning hair sideways over his scalp. Around his neck he hangs a large gold (plated) key of no practical value, which is his personal symbol as the 'warden' of the shanty. His outward appearance is of a conceited and silly man, but this is a ruse he likes to play until he knows who his enemies are – and then they feel his anger.



He is distrustful of the Children of Erebus since it also falls to him to repel any wandering Daemons that come out of the steelmills, but he knows that he lacks the magical and psychic strength to go against them.



Children of Erebos

Not an official organisation by any means, the Children are magic-users who have banded together as a power-block, to keep the rest of the shanties in awe - even the warlords will think twice before crossing them.

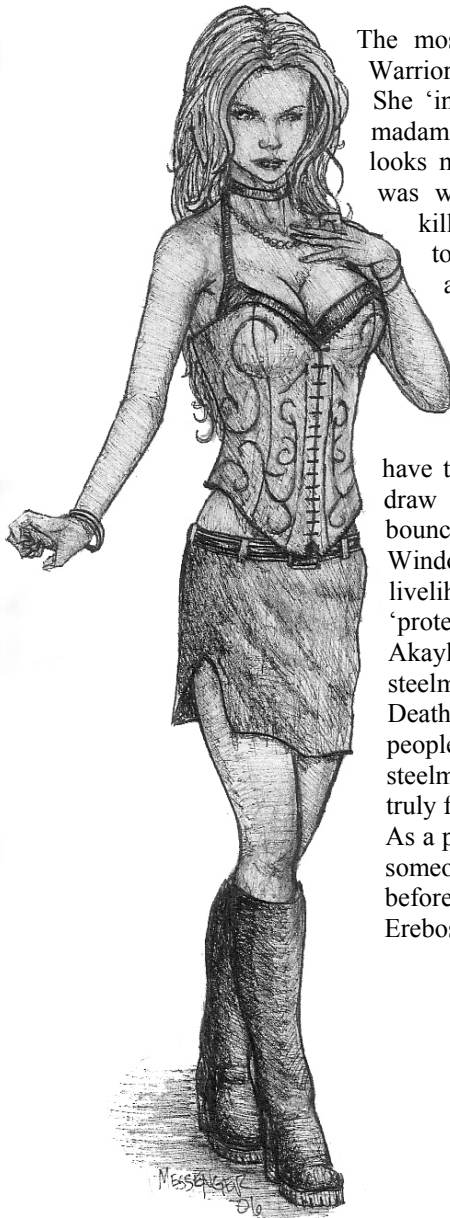
Among the secrets the Children hold, is the only safe passage into the steelmills without having to walk through the shanties and scale the barrier wall.

The Children sometimes pilgrimage to the steelmills to make sacrifices and court Daemons. If they show anyone their secret route, it will only be to lure them into the steelmills to sacrifice or offer them to a Daemon.

LANDMARKS Mayfield

Akayli

The most powerful of the Children is Akayli, a Mind Warrior, and proprietor of the Red-Window whorehouse. She 'inherited' the position after dispatching the former madam, who suggested that Akayli's good looks might 'fetch a few coins' as Akayli was walking past one day. After killing their madam, Akayli took pity on the working girls and took over the operation, trying to improve it.



With red hair, pouting lips, baby blue eyes, and a pale complexion, when dressed and wearing makeup Akayli has the stereotypical appearance of the perfect whorehouse madam. Young and beautiful enough to have to keep fending off customers, her very presence is a bid draw card in the Red-Window, and not one of the whores, bouncers, barmen, cooks or cleaners who work in the Red-Window will let any harm come to her since she is now their livelihood. Red-Window customers may also provide any 'protection' she might ask from them.

Akayli is presently looking for a suitable sacrifice to lure into the steelmills, to form a pact with an unusually powerful Dancer of Death with which she has made contact. She is one of the few people who has an inkling of who or what is in charge at the steelmills (see The Abandoned Steelmills), and what she knows truly frightens her.

As a person who has strong ambitions, Akayli is also looking for someone who will kill Councillor Smeat (see Civic - Council) before the next election, so that she can run as the Circle of Erebos representative.

Stockton

Stockton is the ocean-side peninsula on the north side of Novacastria harbour. Access is possible via land across Kooragang Island and the old Stockton Bridge coming from the city, although the LEOs only lightly patrol this approach. The common route of getting to Stockton is by harbour ferry.

Aside from the LEOs and Sea-net operators, very few people have permanent houses in Stockton.

Because the area lies at the start of the 'short-road' to Port Stephens, to the north, there is a way house in Stockton, called 'The Sigma', named after an old wreck that sits off Stockton beach. The short-road north is, however, the dangerous road, and if there are any travellers seeking shelter at the Sigma way-house, they will be of the hardest and most resourceful nature.

The LEOs and Sea-net maintenance crews that work in Stockton can be trusted not to desert their posts, but they also keep a large rowboat ready and properly stored (inverted and raised on logs) in case they must evacuate the peninsula via the harbour.

Stockton is wildly beautiful at night, and locals sometimes converge on the beach at a bonfire, to feel the stiff sea breeze and smell the fresh salty air, and gaze at the millions of stars that are once again visible in the sky since the old world was destroyed. Local fishermen catch flathead, snapper, and bream on the long sandy patches of beach, occasionally throwing back the odd mutant eel that gets hooked.

LEOS

There is a station of a dozen LEOs on weekly rotation from the barracks in Civic, trustworthy men and women armed with melee weapons. There is also a locker that holds two sealed Steyr-Aug rifles that can be broken out in an emergency. The main goal of the LEOs is the defence of the Sea-net, and their main enemies are small sea-going Daemons and bands of bandits.

The Northern Sea Net

The Sea-net is anchored deep into the sandy soil of Stockton with buried stone weights the project above the ground. The cable crews regularly scour the cables for rust, and oil the cable-anchor joints.

The Sea-net was important in protecting Novacastria from a marauding sea-beast over a decade ago, but no serious attacks have occurred for years and the cable crews work slowly and often take long breaks in their work to soak in the sun, and dip their feet in the water (under the protective watch of the LEOs).

Politicians in Civic have started questioning the usefulness of the Sea-net, but they are opposed by the LEOs, who see it as a 'working deterrent' that has actually prevented attacks for the last decade. If either faction knew what was going on just outside the harbour walls they would have no doubt about the net's value (see 'The Wreck of the Sigma').

Stockton Beach

South of Novacastria the incorrectly named 'Nine Mile' beach is only one mile long, but Stockton Beach to the north of Novacastria easily is nine. Locals speculate that this error in naming was due to sloppy paperwork somewhere back in the early days of the city's founding.

At around 40 kilometres in length, Stockton beach runs all the way from Novacastria north to Port Stephens, the next significant port on the coast.

Adventurous travellers, and local sand-sailors, sometimes attempt the run up the beach, which is about four times faster than taking the inland road, but the risk of ambush from the sand dunes (by bandits) and from the water (by Daemons) is almost guaranteed.

The surf at the southern end of the beach is home to the wreck of the Sigma, an old merchant ship. On land the shifting sands hide the bones and wrecked equipment of countless fools and adventurers who stayed outside the protective arms of civilisation (see Outside the City).

Civic

Civic LANDMARKS

The official political and administrative centre of Novacastria is a broad and well-developed area called Civic. Apart from the council, the area also contains the southern Sea-net, a hospital, lighthouse, and the harbour docks.

The shops of Civic are the best stocked for hundreds of miles, and apart from exploration gear, any kind of food, art, tool, etc. that is for sale can be found here.

Of particular importance are the two local banks, because cheques and paper money-transfers are accepted means of commerce in Novacastria. There is also a horse-driven printing press, which produces copies of papers from the University and old books. The owners of the press are always interested in buying scavenged books for reproduction – high school maths text books, family medical books, equipment manuals, old road maps – all such information is priceless in a Daemornian society.

The people in Civic move about their business calmly and quietly, and a hue-and-cry is rarely heard in the area. The main commercial district is close to the Docks, and the smell of brine and fish drifts constantly west and south from the water. The city Council used to look after the carefully potted plants in the area, but the gritty soil required too much water, so the carefully manicured lanes of trees were replaced with rows of native eucalyptus trees and Morton bay figs.

LEOS

Most of the LEOs who work in Novacastria are stationed at Civic, and either rotate through other posts or stage their sweeps out of Civic. As the only area outside of Sydney with a hospital, for a LEO to be able to end a sweep and return to Civic is a true blessing.

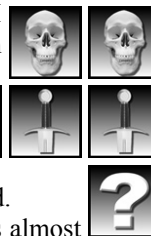
Apart from the number of LEOs in Civic, the guardhouse is extremely important for the reason that it holds a major weapons cache – two dozen Steyr-Aug rifles, half-a-dozen H&K automatic pistols, and several thousand rounds of ammunition. This hardware in itself is probably the most valuable thing the city owns, and it is guarded by zealous fighters, magic-users, psykers, and ex-thieves. No LEO is allowed to even pull guard duty at the cache unless they have served for a number of years, and have been personally approved by Sergeant Atard.

Sergeant Atard

All LEOs do their basic training in Civic under the disciplined gaze of the RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major), Sergeant Atard, who is rumoured to have trained with Blademasters, and who knows how to ‘gut a man five ways before he hits the ground.’

Atard is a diminutive, bald, muscle-bound fighter, with a walrus moustache. He is often dressed immaculately, but this is offset by a hideous necklace of claws, teeth, and feathers taken from Daemons and monsters he has killed.

His ears are pierced by gold rings, but after too many years firing sidearms he is almost deaf – which makes him easy to sneak up upon, a secret he keeps hidden at all costs. To compensate for his deafness when he speaks, Atard literally screams at his men, and demands that they speak likewise when they address him.



LANDMARKS

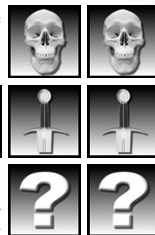
Civic - The Southern Sea-net

Commander Toban Bryan

The leader of the LEOs is Commander Toban Bryan. Toban grew up in the wilderness and was a skilled thief before the age of ten. He was picked up by a LEO patrol lead by the then 'Corporal' Atard, who recognised the boy's intelligence and offered him a better life, which Toban has always been grateful for. Toban grew up, and courted and married Councillor Helena, and with her influence and his own ability quickly made the rank of Commander.

Toban is of average height, with a strong-light physique, but good reflexes and an excellent aim with a rifle. He has dark brown hair and eyes, and is generally physically unassuming. However, anyone who has ever met Toban will attest that he is one of the most 'intense' people they know – he has an enhanced mental strength double that of a typical psyker!

At present Toban's main concern is for his son Pyor and daughter Susin, who are both adults but act more like errant children in their quest to become famous fighters. Their quest is, of course, a reaction against their sometimes overbearing and unyielding father.



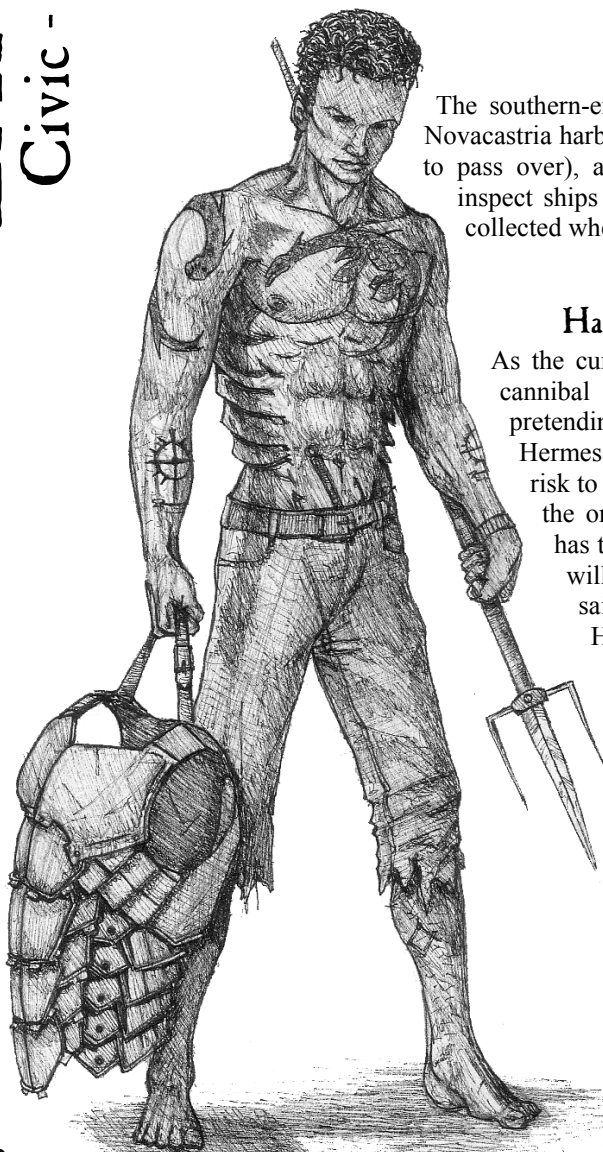
The Southern Sea-net

The southern-end of the net designed to keep the unwanted out of Novacastria harbour. At this end the net can be lowered (to allow boats to pass over), and the harbour-master can send out a pilot boat to inspect ships and/or collect a 'net-tax' (which would otherwise be collected when the vessel has berthed).

Harbour-Master and Pilot Hermes

As the current harbour master (the last was eaten by a cannibal crew that tried to berth in the harbour, pretending to be ordinary traders) it is up to Hermes to decide whether a vessel presents a risk to the harbour or not, and only he can give the order to lower the Sea-net. If he has to row out to inspect a vessel, he will take a full crew of trained sailors with him, as well as his trident and heavy armour.

Hermes is a young man, devoted to the Path of the Ocean. He has dark curly hair, keeps clean shaven with a cut-throat razor, and has been tattooed with pictures of sea monsters and symbols of navigation. A childhood mutation left him with gills (under his ribs), so he has no fear of drowning, and can always make a quick escape out of trouble via the water.



The City Council

LANDMARKS

Civic - The City Council

The Council has five members, and it meets in its chambers every second day, unless it has to deal with an urgent matter. Apart from the Councillors, a cadre of administerial officials is present at these meetings, as well as a guard comprised of some of the finest LEOs in Novacastria. Although all five Councillors can sit in council, only three are required for a council session to reach quorum (be legitimate).

Council elections occur once every four years, and are open to anyone who can make it to the chambers to vote. This arrangement excludes most people from the Hunter townships from ever voting, and is a bone of contention between the Alliance and the Centralists. The next vote is scheduled for some time in the near future.

Council decisions are the law in Novacastria, and although the investigation and prosecution of crimes is the purview of the LEOs, any 'politically sensitive' crimes are always brought before the Council, and the LEOs have always accepted the Council's decision, even though by law the LEOs can pass their own judgements.

Councillor Redweigh

Elected as a representative of local business, Redweigh is a shrewd negotiator and known to have brokered the best trade deals Novacastria has ever achieved with Sydney and Nathrad, and with the Moriori Kingdom of the southern pacific.

An ardent Centralist, Redweigh would include Sydney in his plans for power if he was able to extend Novacastria's power that far! He claims to care nothing about magic and Daemons, and only for order and prosperity, whatever the cost. His one known public weakness is for the delights of the shanty towns, particularly the Red-Window in Murderfield, although as an unmarried man this is not considered a liability, just a character flaw.

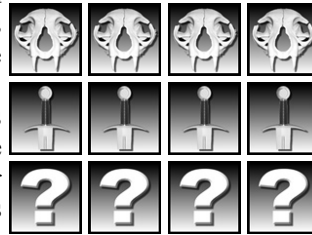
Redweigh is a tall man, with thin arms and legs but a stocky frame, and not the best of health. He has short and neat red hair, unblinking green eyes that can stare anyone down, and at forty years of age he has so many freckles that he looks permanently tanned. He wears well made but uncomfortable looking clothes, always with a coat no matter the heat.

The physical mutations he possesses are all unseen – he can let loose an electrical discharge that can kill an able bodied man (his hair stands on end with static electricity when this is about to happen – it is the only warning sign), and his skin is impervious to fire.

In secret, Redweigh is also the leader of the Dark Circle, and a true servant of Erebos, although he is careful to protect his public image – the business community would dump him if they learnt of his allegiance to the Daemons. He claims to have an 'open mind' on the subject of Erebos, and will listen to 'commercial or industrial applications' of Daemonic power, although he has never officially approved any.

A politician and negotiator, Redweigh is weak in combat, although his Daemonic allies have given him protection. In reality he is a very skinny man, and what he carries around his waist is a large centipede-like guardian Daemon that burrows just below his skin (making it appear lumpy and misshapen, which is hardly out of place in this day and age). The Daemon must emerge from its burrow to work its magic – it is a powerful magic-user and has a poisonous sting. While burrowed the Daemon is invisible to sight and channels all its powers towards concealing itself.

Redweigh is aware of Colonel Lewis' ambitions in Singleton, and has been leaking official reports of Daemonic activity in the steelmills to him, hoping to provoke the Colonel into invading the city to help him 'restore order'. What he needs is for some major and significant Daemonic incursion to take place, and finally convince the Colonel to enter the city with his war-band and secure it under 'Centralist' rule.

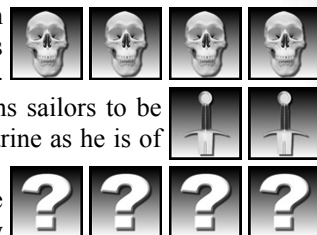


LANDMARKS

Civic - The City Council

Councillor Margrave

Margrave is the most experienced sailor and navigator in Novacastria, and he used to skipper the HMAS Oberon. He was captain of the submarine when it fought and torpedoed the sea-monster that threatened the city over ten years ago, and he still trains sailors to be ships officers. He is well aware of the current condition of the submarine as he is of all the ships in the harbour.

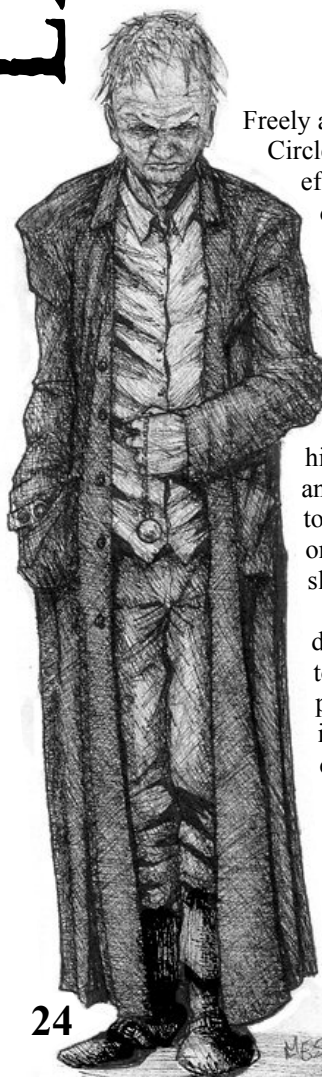


Margrave is a good friend of Hermes, the harbour master, and the pair often sits in a fishing boat in the middle of the harbour where they can talk politics and swap old war-stories without being bothered by anyone but the occasional rower.

At almost sixty years of age, Margrave is one of the oldest Councillors, but he remains active and can acquit himself well in a fight. He has a thick wave of black hair, which is literally a mane, and his men used to say that he had the uncanny ability to 'see in the dark'.

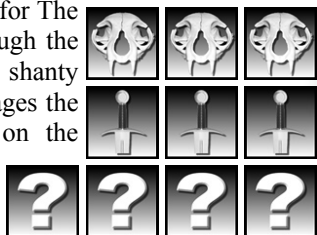
Despite his militaristic abilities, Margrave is a believer in the Alliance, and a free-spirit at heart. He is a good judge of character and can refer those he likes to the right people – Councillor Helena, Commander Bryan, Doctor Chang, or any of the leaders of the Hunter townships, except Colonel Lewis of Singleton.

Margrave regularly sails up to Forester-Tuncurry, and has been looking for a way to unite the torn townships and bring them into the Alliance, and he also organises recon trips to the North Coast as far as the edges of the Gold Coast, keeping an eye on the Daemon infestation there. He is also an advocate of building a long-distance trading and research vessel (see Building the Tasman Explorer), which he would volunteer to skipper if it were launched.



Councillor Smeat

Freely acknowledging to the public his membership and support for The Circle, Smeat has come to power over several elections through the efforts of the Children of Erebus, who hound all the shanty dwellers to vote once every four years. Smeat often engages the other Councillors in acidic debate over any matter on the agenda, and he has joined the Society for Magic Purity not because he believes in their aims, but simply to irk Councillor Helena by belonging to the same organisation of which she is a member.



Smeat used to live in the shanties, and lead The Children, but he has started to slip away from his lowly roots and is enjoying the high life in Civic. This has not put him out of favour with the other shanty dwellers. They would do the same if they could, and they fight each other for any morsels thrown from his table, but he is now so out of touch with local politics that he is unaware of any moves made against him. Indeed, he only goes back to the shanties to lord it over people and enjoy the rotten fruit of the slums.

At about fifty years of age, Smeat has lived a long way past the age most shanty dwellers make it to, and it shows in the pitted and craggy face of someone who grew up too near an abandoned, Daemon-haunted steelmills. His remaining hair is grey and patchy, and his back is hunching over, although his beady eyes flicker with a malign intelligence. He was once the best psyker in the shanties, although this is now questionable.

The other Councillors often try to meet without Smeat, but his psychic nose for intrigue and danger always let him know if the Council is in session – that and the fact he has paid spies in the LEOs and administrative staff! Neither a Centralist nor a supporter of the Alliance, Smeat holds out to be courted by both groups, publicly selling his support to the highest bidder.

Despite his political influence The Circle appreciates Smeat's support but personally dislikes him so much as to avoid him if they can. Smeat would offer to pay handsomely for information that would point him directly to whoever is currently in charge of The Circle, since he doesn't actually know who this is, and someone is actively blocking his efforts to become a senior member.

Councillor Doctor Chang

As the chief-administrator for the John-H hospital is Councillor Dr. Chang, who has grown more and more conservative with age. His duties force him to make life-and-death decisions every day, and he deals with this by focusing on simple pragmatic solutions in all things – which makes him a Centralist almost by default – although as a semi-academic he is open to discuss the merits of the Alliance's case.

Chang used to be married, but lost his wife to the hardships of post-Daemornia life several years ago, and subsequently does very little entertaining. This has weakened him politically, and his chair in the Council is perhaps one of the more easily contested in an election. In truth he would not mind losing to a worthy candidate, but he feels compelled to nominate himself out of a sense of civic responsibility. If he knew a radical or unstable candidate was targeting his constituency he would also, like a surgeon, find someone who could act as his scalpel and remove the problem before it became too big. He is cautious, however, and understands that if he asked the wrong sort of people for help, he could end up being blackmailed later on.

Chang is descended from Chinese forbearers, several generations ago. However, since that time his family inter-married with northern and southern European partners in Australia, until there was little evidence of an Asiatic heritage. Physically he is a typical human, except for his physical mutation of large-red eyes, which enable him to look at the infra-red signature of a person and determine their medical condition quickly and accurately. His hair is black, but greying heavily.

Although he will not admit it to anyone, Chang was once saved by a Gurri shaman when he caught a nasty fever while travelling outside the city. The experience humbled him, although he knows the cure was not conventional medicine per-se, and he is now a secret supporter of Ungawa. If Tjabuinji (see The Stadium) or any other supporter of Ungawa ends up in hospital Chang will give them preferential treatment and they will incur no medical expenses.

Chang has no combat ability, is not psychic or a magic-user, and would not last a minute in a real fight. He is not very strong and shows clear signs of aging. The only thing that regularly gets his blood pressure up is arguing with Councillor Smeat, and sometimes with Councillor Margrave when he comes up with 'another hare-brained scheme!'



LANDMARKS

Civic - The City Council

Councillor Helena

Helena was the leading researcher at the University (see Sandgate), and she gave up a lot of her research time to marry Commander Bryan and have a family, and later become a Councillor. She remains a more than competent spell caster, and is a lay member of the Society for Magical Purity, although she doubts the hypothesis they work under regarding Gurri magic and expects it to be proven false soon.

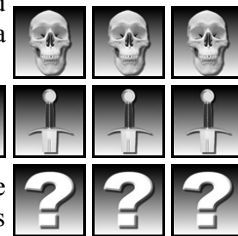
As a scholar Helena has full access to the University and most of the research labs, although she is highly ethical in what she uses these resources for, and it would take a lot of persuading for her to use this access for unlawful or illicit purposes.

Helena was a member of the Alliance, but after living for many years with a staunch Centralist (Bryan) her public image is now one of a 'fence-sitter', and she is reluctant to give her opinion on the Alliance-v-Centralist debate.

Although now middle-aged, Helena retains the classical beauty of her youth and still knows how to take advantage of it when necessary. Helena is tall for a woman, with brown-blond hair and brown eyes, and although she has a stern demeanour her friends and relatives know that she is more compassionate than she shows herself to be. If asked if she has any 'mutations' she laughs and only responds by saying 'giant-sized intelligence and a supernatural sense of a humour!'

The Councillor thinks The Circle of Erebus a bunch of fools, although she is polite to their faces, and she suspects them of having darker motives than they claim. This puts her squarely at odds with Councillor Smeat.

Helena will readily take an active role in the defence of the city, backing up her husband and the LEOs, and it is from their mother that hers and Commander Toban's children get their reckless streak. Helena's main concern at the moment is to re-establish the transmitter tower at Adamstone and use it for a bold experiment (see World of Progress).



LANDMARKS

Civic - The Lighthouse

The Lighthouse, 'Nobbie'

Affectionately known to the locals of the city as 'Nobbie', the lighthouse at the entrance to the harbour was built to last, and was restored from its place as a historical monument to a working device during the Daemornia. The electric bulb was replaced with a natural gas flame, which has needed careful tending ever since.

The whitewash is always in need of repainting, but structurally the building is as good as a fort, and could last for centuries. The place is often windswept, full of the sounds of the ocean and waves crashing into the breakwater, but oblivious to the noises of commerce and industry from the city.

Nathiel, Lighthouse Keeper

The current lighthouse keeper is Nathiel, an old mariner who used to serve with Margrave on the HMS Oberon. It was once Nathiel's duty to dive under the submarine and clear an old fishing net that had fouled it the hydroplane, and while doing so he was attacked by a dread Gurri spirit (see The Black Cave). Although he survived physically, the encounter left him mentally unhinged.

Unfortunately, when he was pulled from the sea unconscious he retained the evil spirit inside him, and during night, and particularly at the full moon the spirit awakens and struggles to return to the water and wreak havoc.

Nathiel will shoot his crossbow at anyone who approaches the lighthouse at night, or attack them with his hatchet. During a full moon, he will also stand on the lighthouse walkway, drinking moonshine and yelling obscenities at the dark ocean. When the wind blows in from the sea his cries can be heard all the way to Civic, but under orders of Councillor Margrave (who still feels guilty about ordering Nathiel into the water) he is left alone by the LEOs.

Exorcising a spirit that has lived within a body so long would be a dangerous undertaking, and most shamans have advised against it. The reward would be the respect of Councillor Margrave, Hermes, and the rest of the ship crews.



John-H Hospital

LANDMARKS

Civic - John-H Hospital

The 'John-H' is the only true hospital outside of Sydney (the Traitor Daemons of Nathrad don't need hospitals). It is a squat building with peeling paint, and grubby salt sprayed windows. Inside it smells like soap and chlorine, and strong but diffuse light casts a lot of glare about. At night-time the nurses light candles inside secured fireproof sand trays, and the windows are always left ajar no matter how cold it gets.

Amongst its facilities the hospital has a trauma unit that can treat claw, blade and gunshot wounds, a roster of general practitioners, a pharmacy, and a well-stocked burns unit (as does any hospital that has to deal with the victims of Daemons).

The head administrator at the John-H is Councillor Chang (see Civic) who rarely practices surgery due to 'shaky hands', but he does consultations when he can make the time. His biggest concern is always to obtain medical supplies. He will hire on explorers for 'recon missions' to old military bases and decaying population centres along the southern coast, but has little concern for any dangers, and he considers those who gather supplies-for-money as expendable in rebuilding the city.

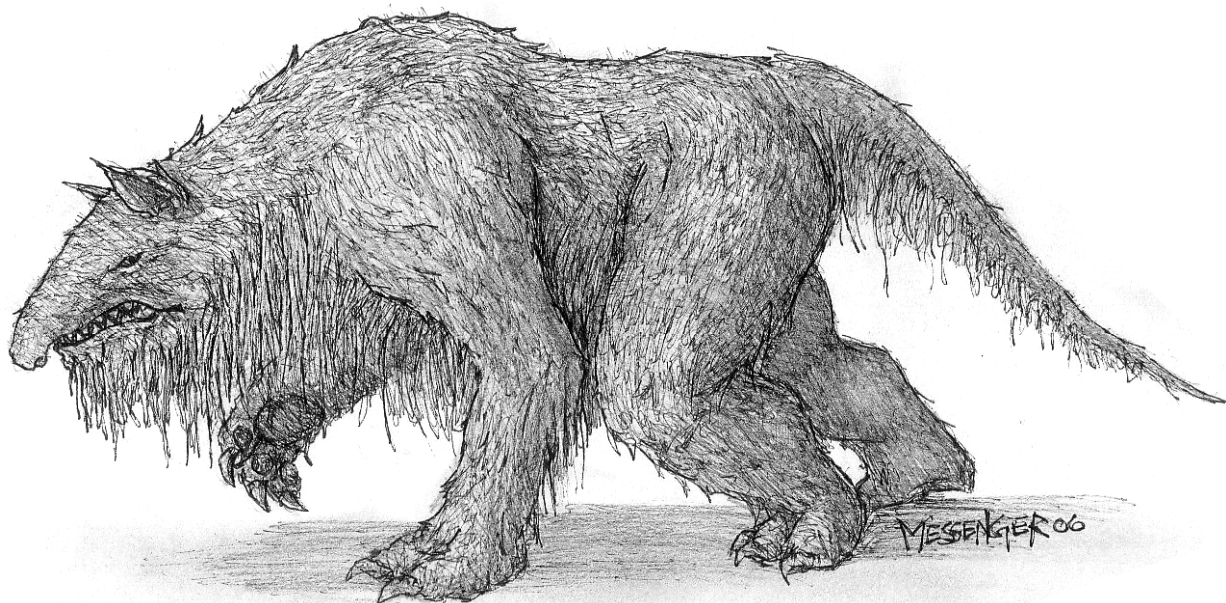
The Hospital is rubble on the ninth floor, due to fighting that took place during the battle to reclaim the city, but the area is avoided by all the staff because it is literally haunted.

THE NINTH FLOOR

The ninth floor of the John-H is haunted by the spirits of powerful creatures. During the Daemonic occupation of Novacastria, a Palorchestes was drawn out of the bush to the hospital by the smell of blood. In the hospital it was attacked by a Hell Hound, and the two creatures killed each other in a ferocious battle.

Anyone brave enough to spend the night on the ninth floor may witness a ghostly re-enactment of the life and death struggle, but is forced to chose sides and may even be killed during the conflict. The Palorchestes is strong in Gurri magic, while the Hell Hound is of course a Daemon, and the animosity between these two entities would be of serious interest to both Ungawa and the Society for Magical Purity.

If the players chose sides and force an outcome to the battle other than a mutual kill, then the losing spirit will vanish, destroyed forever, and the spirit of the victor will escape from the hospital and never be seen again. Whichever spirit is the victor, if the players fought along side that spirit, it may come to aid them against their foes at some time in the future, at the GM's discretion.



LANDMARKS

Civic - The Docks

The Docks



The docks are the new lifeblood of the city, and pulse with the sound of goods coming and going, but mainly going, because Novacastria is a major exporter of agricultural goods and the sales channel for the Hunter Valley townships.

The docks are deep enough to berth the biggest merchant ships in existence, and wooden scaffolds and rope-pulleys literally fill the air, along with the cries of sailors and dock workers.

Harbourmaster Hermes (see the Southern Sea-net) is often down at the docks, inspecting cargo manifests, looking for contraband, and taking the 'net-tax'.

As well as fresh seafood, numerous vendors' set up shop selling cooked fish, crabs, prawns, and squid; the aroma of cooked seafood can be smelt from dawn to dusk.

At the southern end of the docks is a glass 'fish tank' into which all the mutant and aberrant fish and crustaceans are tossed when the fishing boats sort their catch – an interesting showpiece that attracts children, and the occasional follower of Erebos to 'wonder at his works!'

'HMAS OBERON'

The Oberon is a diesel-electric submarine that was brought out of retirement (actually it was reassembled from community parks and gardens around the country) in the early days of the Daemornia. At that time, the Novacastria shipyards were well equipped to restore a submarine, and the heavy traffic too and from the harbour picking up agricultural produce ensured that there was enough diesel to last for decades if conserved properly. However, the war ended and the Oberon languished as people turned their attention to rebuilding.

After Novacastria was re-established the Council of the day made maritime trade their main priority, and the harbour grew prosperous. However, all the activity attracted the attention of a great sea-Daemon, as one unfortunate freighter passed over the Mariana Trench on its way south. The Daemon followed the freighter all the way to Novacastria, and struck against the city the night it arrived.

The Council ordered the construction of the Sea-net, which after a fortnight the LEOs were able to put in place after using grenades to drive the monster out of the harbour. What ensued next was a stalemate. The beast lurked outside the net and attacked approaching vessels, while the city could only look on in vain.

Councillor Margrave, then a skipper, proposed that the Oberon be restored and launched at once, and after a quick debate the plan was agreed upon. Margrave himself skippered the submarine and managed to torpedo the sea monster, although by all accounts the encounter was far from a textbook military operation.

The Oberon took pride of place in Novacastria harbour where it remains today – a visible deterrent to sea Daemons and raiders alike, and a guarantee of safety to visiting ships.

However, all is not what it seems on board the submarine. As far as can be determined the old diesel engine has been damaged by running with contaminated ethanol; whether this was an accident or sabotage is unknown. The batteries contain enough juice to flood and blow the ballast tanks several times, but would dry up in half an hour if used to move the submarine. The Oberon's failing condition is masked by 'fake' training runs, in which the submarine submerges and lies beneath the end dock for several hours, before resurfacing. The water is very deep, but just to be sure the sub is 'taken out' only on dark and stormy days or nights. A big song-and-dance is made of the event, and the entire crew is sworn to secrecy. The Council is extremely worried about what will happen when the secret is finally uncovered, but has yet to come up with a solution!

THE FERRIES

Several privately owned boats ferry passengers and goods around the harbour, across to the Shipyards or Stockton, and as far up the river as Sandgate and the Hexham Bridge. The names of the ferries are colourful (the 'Sandlady', the 'Jules Vernacular', and the 'Mute Newt'), and the ferry owners are highly competitive and entrepreneurial in trying to steal each other's customers.

THE 'JAMES CRAIG' (WOODEN CLIPPER)

The James Craig is a reconstructed 19th century iron barque, built as a tourist attraction for Sydney. It fled into the open sea during the Daemornia and made port again one year after the war in Novacastria. Since then the city Council has maintained the ship, keeping on the descendents of her owner as ship's captains. The James Craig spends most of her time in use either as a merchant vessel, or as an exploration vessel, fulfilling the wishes of the city Council.

'CONDOR' (FIBREGLASS MAXI YACHT)

Formerly a racing yacht, turned into a comfortable ocean cruiser, Condor has a fibreglass hull (now repaired by magic) although the original aluminium alloy mast has been replaced by a wooden one.

Fitted with a full complement of canvas sail, including an enormous spinnaker, she is easily one of the fastest boats of the post-Daemornian age. Lacking electronics and power-winch, she has proven to be a valuable resource for the city Council, where more complicated vessels have failed, broken-down, or been impossible to repair. The Council will 'hire' Condor to any concern that is able to leave behind sufficient collateral.

LANDMARKS

The Abandoned Steelmills



The abandoned steelmills dominate the nature of the city in a more than simply geographical sense. The folklore of the city tells of a time when the steelmills were the beating heart of the city, but then bad times came and they were forced to shut down. Depression and a brief wave of suicides hit the city, before the people found other ways to get by.

Later, as Sydney expanded to near bursting point, Newcastle (Novacastria) became an attractive place to live, and even the steelmills were partially reactivated and boutique steel industries flourished, although the psyche of the city was wary about putting all their eggs in one basket again - they had the University now, and a flourishing artistic and cultural community.

Unfortunately, General Kaol had done his research on Australia, and the destruction of high-tech industry in Novacastria was an important Daemonic target, and during the Daemornia the city suffered once again for having a working steelmills, but not in any way that could have been predicted. Not only were the steelmills crippled, but assassin Daemons were dispatched to kill all the engineers and steelworkers who lived in Novacastria (those who commuted from the Hunter Valley were spared, surprisingly).

When the city was reclaimed by the human and allied races during the last war, the decision was made not to enter the maze of the steelmills (which would have been extremely costly in terms of lives lost), but instead to build a barrier around them and lock the problem out. The barrier formed the northern and eastern border of Mayfield, and has since been extended to isolate the Shipyard.

Now that the Daemornia is fading into history, the shadows of the steelmills and its giant towers are reminding the people that great things can still be done there, if they are willing to pay the price.

LANDMARKS

The Abandoned Steelmills

Reactivating the steelmills is an important goal of both the Centralists and the Alliance, but the most risky venture that either one could undertake. Two expeditions have ventured into the steelmills since the Daemornia, but both of them vanished without a trace. At the urging of Councillor Redweigh the Council has placed a ban on anyone entering the steelmills without approval - not only to save lives, but also to avoid bringing down the wrath of whatever is there upon the city. The LEOs take this ban very seriously, but the shantytowns provide an illicit gateway that they cannot shut down.

DAEMONIC ACTIVITY

The abandoned factories and mills are the centre of all obvious Daemonic activity in Novacastria. Although the LEOs patrolling the Mayfield barrier never clearly see any Daemons, or anything that looks like a Daemon, the insane howls and chittering noises that echo in the empty spaces are a clear indicator that the place has more than one unnatural inhabitant.

Both the Dark Circle, and the Children of Erebus, secretly venture into the steelmills to forge pacts with Daemons and carry out their rites of worship, but even they do not know the true numbers of the Daemons.

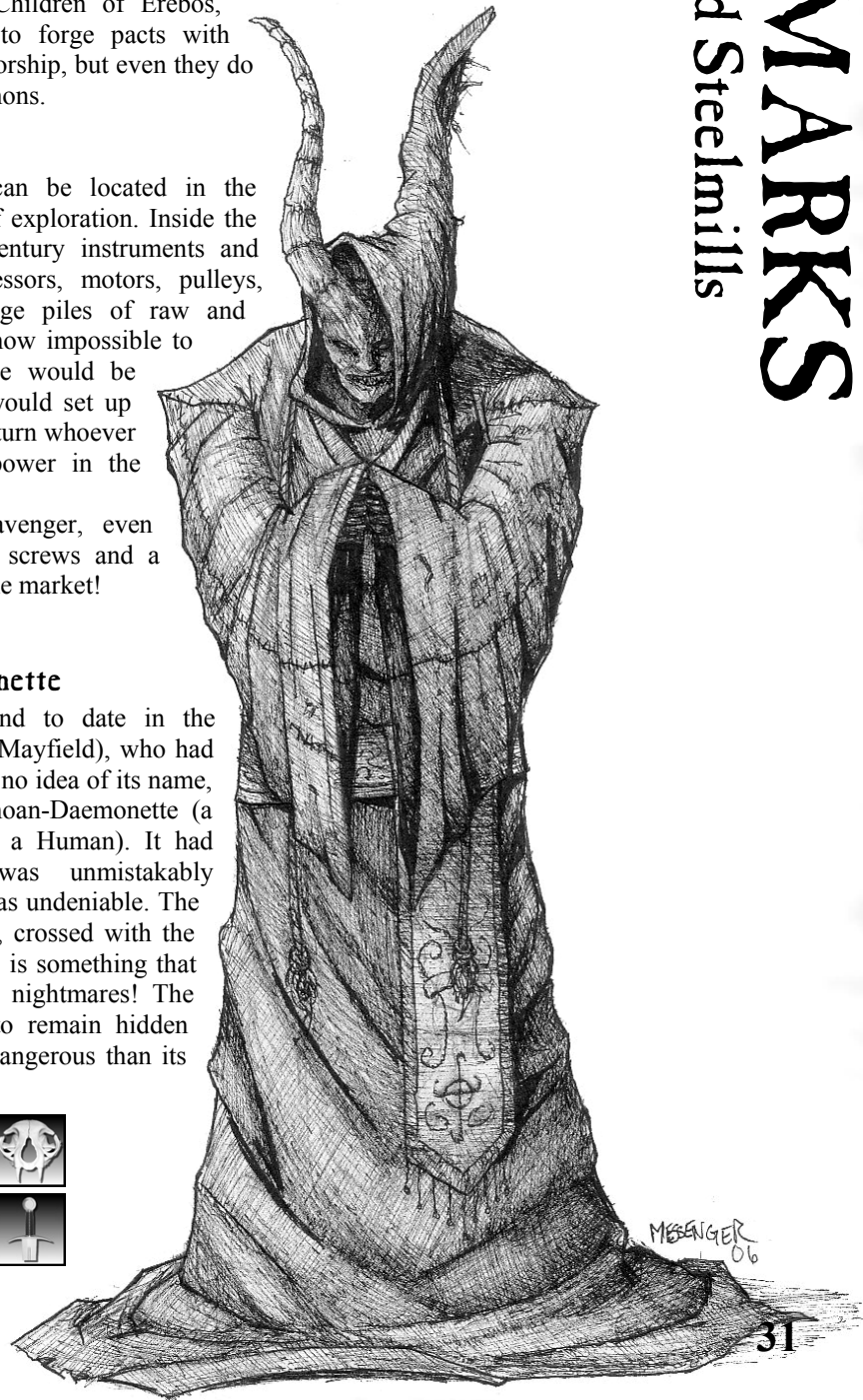
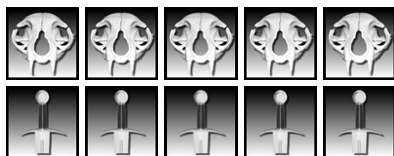
ANCIENT WONDERS

The machinery and tools that can be located in the steelmills make it a tempting target of exploration. Inside the deserted buildings are twenty-first century instruments and equipment, repairable trains, compressors, motors, pulleys, even medicines, not to mention huge piles of raw and processed steel, some of it in alloys now impossible to replicate. Claiming this treasure-trove would be worth more than gold or guns, and would set up whoever was able to do it for life, and turn whoever gained such resources into a true power in the world!

For the lowly explorer and scavenger, even something as simple as a packet of screws and a screwdriver would fetch a fortune on the market!

The Minoan-Daemonette

The most powerful creature found to date in the steelmills was sighted by Akayli (see Mayfield), who had the good sense to hide from it. She has no idea of its name, but she believes that she saw a Minoan-Daemonette (a crossbreed born from a Minoan and a Human). It had prominent Minoan horns, and was unmistakably Daemonic, but its Human parentage was undeniable. The dreadful unholy strength of a Minoan, crossed with the guile and resourcefulness of a Human, is something that causes Akayli to wake gasping from nightmares! The fact that it has consciously chosen to remain hidden speaks of an intelligence even more dangerous than its power!



The Shipyard

The Shipyard was abandoned for a long time, and over-run with Daemons, and the operation to re-activate it was costly in terms of lives, but has proven to be profitable in terms of restoring the city and improving the quality of life. The first part of the operation was to extend the barrier around the abandoned steelmills, and the second part was a major sweep by the LEOs south of the barrier towards the water. Hundreds of small Daemons were flushed out and escaped into the water of the harbour, only to be caught in wire nets that had been pre-set, and then be slaughtered. Several larger monstrosities, including some unique and never seen before cross-breeds, chose to stand and fight, exacting a heavy toll on the LEOs, but eventually the Shipyard was secured.

Today the shipyards are hot concrete anvils on which ships are beaten out, always smelling of fresh paint and marine timber. The ringing of hammers goes from sunrise to sunset, except when rest-breaks are called and the only sounds that can be heard are of workers quenching their thirst and telling jokes.

LEOS

No LEOs from the original operation to clear the shipyard are still in active service, and those stationed at the barrier, and among the works under way, are all rotated out of Civic. Because of the importance of the Shipyard, the LEOs shipyard base has a pair of double-barrelled shotguns, and about thirty rounds of ammunition, secured in a combination safe.

In an emergency the ship building crews are bound and able to respond to attacks on the barrier and the shipyard as fairly well equipped and trained fighters, although they are not officially LEOs.

Ship-Building

The Novacastria shipyard has a great tradition of making excellent vessels, and this is carried on by the surviving descendants of those who used to live in the city.

Customers from Sydney, Nathrad, the Moriori Kingdom, Southeast Asia, and even the eastern-pacific region have vessels constructed at the shipyard, and each vessel has the stern embossed with the 'castle & crown' symbol which is the emblem of the city.

The vessels built here are primarily wood based, although with so much scrap metal available in the abandoned steelmills (and people brave enough to go in and try to get it) there is a lot of metal shodding on the hulls, and the vessels have reputations of being able to survive sea-Daemon attacks. The best masts are hauled north from the island of Tasmania, off the southern Australian coast, which grows incredibly tall and straight pine trees as well as hardwoods. Less expensive masts are cut from the tall pine trees that grow in the Hunter Valley. Sails are typically canvas, from cotton grown in the western end of the Hunter (see Cessnock, and Singleton).

FERRIES AND RIVERBOATS

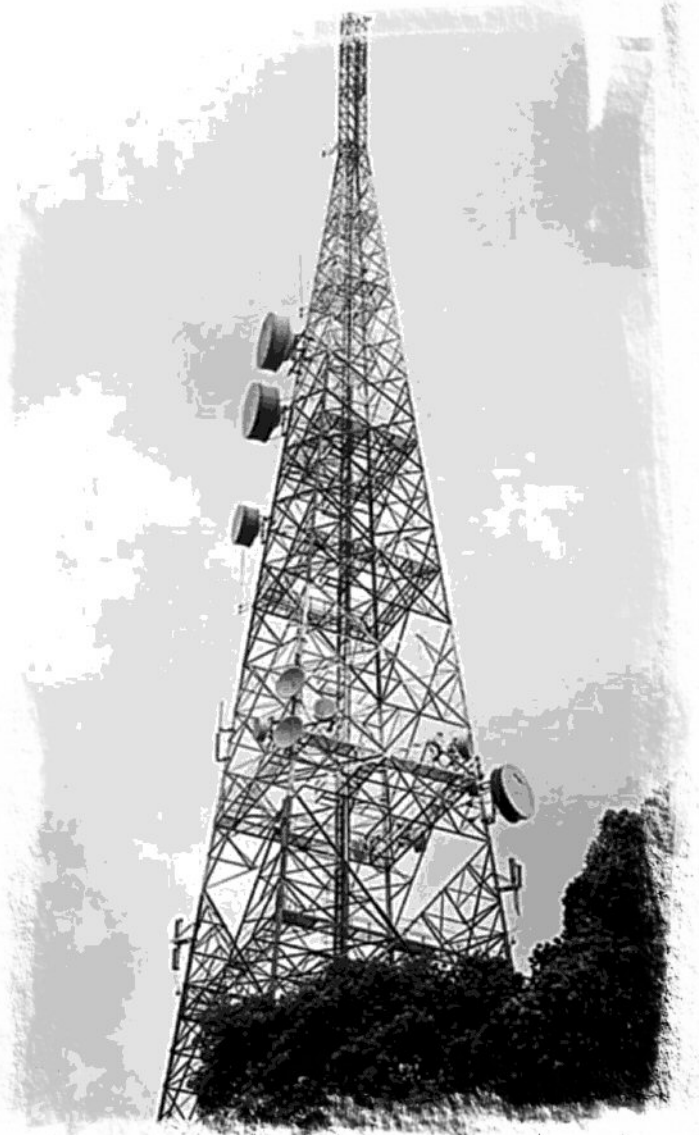
As well as ocean-going vessels, small ferries and shallow bottomed riverboats are constructed and repaired in the shipyards. The asking price to have a commercial vessel constructed is usually set in terms of a percentage of the business revenue the vessel generates, with a contract that ownership of the vessel reverts to the ship builder (the city of Novacastria) if the regular payment scheme is not kept up.

Amongst the ferry and riverboat owners is a whispered rumour that a now-retired Councillor used to hire thugs to disrupt a business' trade, and then demand protection money. Who the Councillor was is not exactly clear, although everyone is sure the practise occurred, and for all they know may still be happening.

Adamstone

LANDMARKS

Adamstone



Adamstone is built on the ridge that overlooks Novacastria city from the south. It is a bushy area, full of native plants and wildlife, and brimming with Gurri magic in the summer, when wattle-trees burst in brilliant yellow colours and perfume the air. Bees are attracted from all over the valley, and the trees literally ‘hum’, bending with the weight of thousands of the tiny insects gathering nectar.

With so much bush around the suburb there is an abundance of wildlife – none more surprising than the Night Stalkers that are sometimes seen moving between the houses.

After the Daemornia, what was left of the suburbs of Adamstone shifted north and west, to be closer to the transmitter tower, which was used as a lookout and an emergency fortification. People also settled in the new location because the large shopping mall in ‘old-adamstown’ had been turned into a haunted ruins, and was infested with Nominods and worse. The folk of Adamstone don’t talk about the haunted ruins any more, and don’t go their either.

The houses of Adamstone are new constructions, made of wood, rather than restored brick buildings, and bushfire is a continual threat, against which magic is the best defence.

LANDMARKS

Adamstone

LEOS

The LEOs who rotate out of Civic and other locations are stationed in the bunker at the base of the transmitter tower, and they patrol westward half-way along the Wall towards Walls-End. From the tower they have excellent bow and rifle cover of the ridge most of the way across to the coast (the weakest point of defence for the city). At night they witness strange fires and lights in the old ruined mall to the south, but since nothing ever comes out of the place they never bother going in after it – whatever ‘it’ is!

Although most of them have no technical ability, the LEOs are trusted to protect the computer and electrical equipment in the bunker that was the epicentre of the pre-Daemornia communications network. Sergeant Atard (see Civic) uses this posting as a test – by having a friend of his pose as a black-market merchant trying to bribe the LEO in question to remove some of the technical equipment in exchange for a sizeable payoff. Failing the ‘test’ won’t get anyone thrown off the LEOs, but they will have to suffer being posted to tougher stations until Sergeant Atard feels they have learnt their lesson.

The Transmitter

The transmitter tower was extended only several years before the Daemornia and is now approximately 90 meters tall (about 270 feet). Sitting on the Adamstone ridge it is the most distinctive marker in the entire city, and at present is used for signal fires, mirror-signalling, and flag signalling.

Surrounding the base of the tower is the township, and keeping the township out (except in the case of emergencies) is a rusty razor-wire fence.

At the base of the tower, next to the western legs of the structure, is a concrete bunker that is the LEO base. Part of it is locked off with secure doors (which only LEOs have the key for) and houses the communications gear. The bunker has enough rations and water to last for several weeks in case of a siege.

An enclosed cage leads up to the first level of the tower, ten meters above the ground, and thence onto the second, third, and fourth levels, each 20 meters apart. The cage acts as physical protection from flying attackers, but defenders inside could be caught and cooked like geese if they faced Fire-Mercs or such creatures.

The transmitter has the potential for being a focal point for future development in the city (see World of Progress).

Night Stalker ‘Blue-Tongue’ Tribe

When the allied races helped to liberate Novacastria, the Night Stalkers who arrived in the city decided to settle there, and called for the rest of their tribe to join them. Adamstone is now home to over five hundred Night Stalkers, a small clan who live alongside the residents of Adamstone, almost invisible to the humans as the move through the bush.

The Night Stalkers took as their totem the semi-poisonous reptile that is ubiquitous throughout the continent – the Blue Tongue Lizard. In special ceremonies the Night Stalkers actually milk and drink the venom of the Blue-Tongue, something that is 100% fatal to a human, but which supposedly sends Night Stalkers on spiritual journeys and ‘tastes great!’, to them at least.

After the Night Stalkers arrived in the area, Tjabuinji and the Gurri elders of Ungawa met with their leader, a shaman called Drjuri-alqa, and established a treaty. In return for living peacefully in Adamstone the Night Stalkers would patrol the land east from where the Wall ends, all the way across the ocean. No one in the city Council was made aware of this treaty; they were simply informed that the Night Stalkers had agreed to leave the human settlers in peace.

As long as the Blue-Tongue tribe is around the city is safe from any attacks along the coast. Many locals have pondered why such an attack has never been attempted, but they simply don’t know all the facts. Any enemy attacking Novacastria would have more luck trying to bring the Wall down, than they would of prevailing against a Night Stalker clan.

Walls-End

LANDMARKS

Walls-End

The further west Novacastria spreads, the closer it gets to the bush, and Walls-end sits right on that boundary. The soil is poor, although not sandy, and only the hardiest native flora thrives there – eucalyptus tress and salt scrub. The sun beats down in summer, and most people keep indoors until the cool sea breeze blows in at night, and the cicadas and other insects make the trees buzz with life.

Walls-end has a working sewage system, but it is unused, the locals preferring septic tanks and recycling ‘grey water’ where they can. Water rationing is necessary because the area has no fresh water supply, and everyone has to rely on old-fashioned rain-tanks, and during droughts on irregular shipments of brackish water from Sandgate. Occasionally children and animals get stuck in the old sewage system and have to be rescued, but the LEO patrols keep it clear of predators and wild animals.

Walls-end is a moderately populated area that functions as a resting place for many merchants and travellers from both the north and south. The local store and business owners, and their families, could be accused of being a bit edgy, but this is understandable in light of the number of attacks made upon the Wall on an almost daily basis.

Because it is such an obvious way for Daemonettes and Fanatics to infiltrate the city, every new traveller is scrutinized fiercely and even subjected by the locals to impromptu magical divinations and psychic mind-readings, in order to verify their true nature. The LEOs turn a blind eye towards this kind of vigilante activity because they recognise how valuable it is.

LEOS

The LEOS stationed at Walls-end are the most heavily equipped outside of the barracks at Civic and the Singleton army base. This firepower makes sense, because the Wall and Hunter’s Gate are the most common points at which outsiders approach the city, and attacks by the ‘People beyond the Wall’ are a daily occurrence.

Despite its ancient name, Walls-end is actually in the middle of the Wall, not at the end, although it is the furthest point the Wall extends to the west. It is the staging area for most of the patrols that secure the Wall, and the LEO stockade has a pair of high-powered .50 calibre anti-material rifles that are deployed in the event of Daemon attack.

Although most troops rotate out of Civic, the commander of the stockade has stayed on-station for the last five years. ‘Chief’ Hurricane is not only one of the best LEOs in Novacastria, but also the captain of the Novacastria Knights Bladehockey team (see Things to See and Do in Novacastria). When on duty he carries his Bladehockey stick, which he uses for administrative punishment, and the LEOs under his command have often held their ground against overwhelming odds, refusing to desert their posts. Although not a great strategist or tactician, the ‘Chief’ commands the absolute respect of all LEOs, even more so than Commander Bryan or Sergeant Atard, because of his personal charisma and his reputation of never having given ground to a foe, no matter the odds.

Apart from defending the Wall, the LEOs also have to perform routine ‘sweeps’ of the disused sewage system, because of the possibility that infiltrators could use it to gain access to the city. Despite this threat, the Council refuses to allow the sewer network to be permanently sealed, believing that the area will grow and require sewage again in the near future.

The People beyond the Wall

The People beyond the Wall are an almost daily threat to the LEOs patrolling out of Walls-End. Novacastrian scientists and shaman have declared that they are some kind of undead, but despite the number of bodies the LEOs pile up each day this has never been conclusively shown, because all of those bodies have been in advanced stages of decay. The fact that they always attack during the day is also anomalous with what is known about undead.

The regular attacks are coordinated with an intelligence superior to that encountered in any other kind of undead. The creatures will lay in ambush for hours, until a merchant comes along and the gates are opened, as if they know that this is when the city is the most vulnerable (see ‘Meet the Locals’ for more details).

The Hunters Gate

The 'Hunters Gate' is the name given to the fortified gate that opens onto the road south to Sydney and the road north to the Hunter Valley. It is as sturdy a fortification as can be built with existing technology. It has mechanical locks that prevent raising of the bars, which the LEOs control and only open if they are sure it is safe. Councillor Helena plans to electrify the gate if power can ever be restored to the city. In the centre of the gate is the symbol of Novacastria – a black tower, ringed by a crown.

Merchants and travellers are taxed by the LEOs at different rates depending on the nature of their business, although it has been a long time since anyone was forced to stay outside the gate because they could not pay. In such cases, some form of labour is required to pay off the debt, such as duty on a Council work-crew, as a LEO, or at the docks.

As the best method of gaining entry into the city (other than going over, under, or around the Wall), the Hunter's Gate is the target of attacks by the undead-like creatures known as the People beyond the Wall.

The Stadium

The tyre marks on the Stadium floor hark back to a time when Novacastria was Newcastle, and the Stadium was an autodrome that held stock cars races and demolition derbies.

The original seats and fixtures are still in place – as are the blood stains on the concrete where the Daemons of Erebos executed people for the viewing pleasure of other Daemons, during the period the city was subjugated.

The Stadium walls stifle the wind, and at ground level the Stadium can get very hot, so most 'punters' watch their favourite events from the upper galleries if they can afford the price of the ticket. The management of the Stadium, including ticket sales, is controlled by the city Council through the LEOs.

The most dangerous occurrence that can happen at the Stadium would be innocent punters ignoring the warning signs (**BEWARE OF THE TREE**) and accidentally straying too close to Nobbie (see Things to See and Do in Novacastria) and being swatted for their impudence.

Apart from Bladehockey, and duels in the Arena, the other big event at the Stadium is the horse-racing season. Horse racing features both timed and competitive events, usually over obstacles, and it also has a combative aspect – horseback archery and marksmanship. Johon Bircher from the Broken O ranch (see The Hunter Valley) always has at least one steed entered in the races, and it is often the favourite.

No one has ever held a horse-back duel, but that is not to say that it wouldn't happen if there was enough interest and promotion. As well as horses, the occasional Kangar is entered in the combative events, but most other type of steeds are to slow.

LEOS

There are no LEOs on permanent station at the Stadium, but regular squads are sent from Civic each day and night on ten-hour rosters. They perform duties more akin to security personnel than a police force – selling tickets, arresting unruly spectators, keeping the peace, resolving disputes over food and merchandise sales, and generally checking for break-ins and vandalism.

Stadium duty is the most sought after post in all the LEO rotations, and Stadium shifts are often used as currency in bartering for other luxuries and perks of the job. The LEOs get to watch a lot of Bladehockey, see many Arena duels, and generally have a much needed chance to relax. LEOs who can pull this shift often also have 'inside-knowledge' about which horses run better in given conditions.

There are no bolters assigned to Stadium duty, although LEOs are allowed to bring personal weapons. A small holding stockade is in the Stadium, but most offenders who have to be arrested are taken to Civic with each shift change.

The Arena

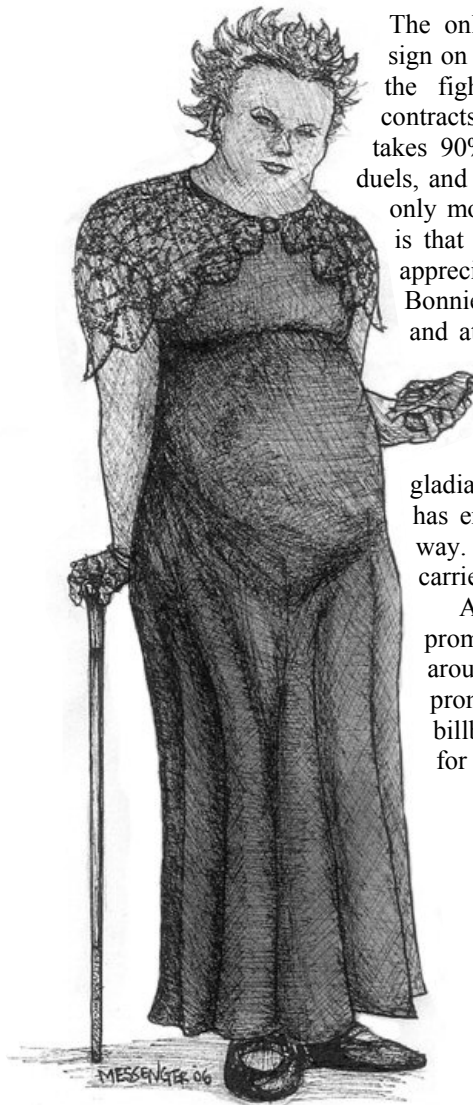
By placing a fifteen-foot high wire cyclone fence around four battered old boxing rings that have been pushed together, a structure known as 'the Arena' is erected on the northern side of the Stadium every time a duel is scheduled. The tunnels used to bring opposing Bladehockey teams on the field come out on either side of the Arena, such that two fighters will not see each other until they reach the fighting platform.

The canvas matting is bloodstained and has numerous stitches where it has been sliced open over the years. In some of the stitching, fragments of white bone can be seen, where it has been splintered and been pushed so deeply into the wooden floor that it cannot be easily removed!

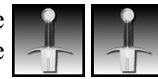
The 'spring' and 'give' of the arena can be adjusted by the ground crew that construct it each time, and enterprising fighters try and bribe the crews to set the Arena in a way that can degrade the style of technically more proficient fighters (flat and hard for grapplers, and loose and springy for impact fighters).

No fighter can organise a duel without someone acting as a promoter, even if that person is themselves, and the better the promoter the more prize money can be negotiated for.

Bonnie Craft, Arena Promoter



The only arena promoter in Novacastria who will sign on untried fighters is Bonnie Craft, but if any of the fighters read the fine print of their contracts they should not be surprised. She takes 90% of any winnings for the first five duels, and reverts to 20% thereafter. The only money she makes no claim over is that thrown into the ring in direct appreciation of a gladiator.



Bonnie has short spiky blonde-grey hair, pale freckled skin, and at forty-five years of age has put on a lot of weight since making the big time in the Arena. She talks with a very fast, punchy manner, and is not afraid of talking down to gladiators. She can always threaten, with a high degree of certainty, to have a gladiator banned from fighting if they harass her, and she has ended the careers of several naïve wannabe's in this way. She wears dark clothing, usually all-black, and carries an iron-tipped walking stick as an affectation.

As far as quality goes, she is better than most other promoters, mainly because she has more money to throw around for bribes and marketing. Bonnie is one of the few promoters who will pay a printer to press flyers and billboards, and she often takes gladiators down to Sydney for big-money duels.

LANDMARKS

The Stadium

Sandgate

Sandgate is as far up the Hunter River as the ferries and deep-draught vessels are able to go. From then on the riverboats carry all the trade and passengers to Thunderbolts Way. A moveable portcullis secures river traffic, and keeps estuarine monsters, sea-Daemons, and Bull Sharks from entering the river system.

Travellers seeking to save a few coins can walk the distance to Sandgate to catch a riverboat; otherwise they have to pay the fare for a ferry ride. The riverboats can travel all the way to the Civic docks, which is ideal for travellers, but only in the calmest of conditions when the seas are flat and the weather is coming from due west. The riverboat owners are loath to go the extra distance, fearing to be caught at the Docks by waves coming across the Sea-net and into the harbour.

There are a few un-named and short-lived Inns that pop up in Sandgate, but most of them cannot survive the low numbers of travellers who stay, since most choose to keep going either up river or all the way to the docks at Civic.

As the name suggests, Sandgate is a dry place, despite being next to the river, with sandy soil that drains quickly and retains few nutrients. The thickest vegetation in the area is along the edges of the water – weeping willows, and mangrove trees – which is replaced with blue gums and turpentine trees further inland. The turpentine trees are a blessing in the wet season; their oily smell keeping mosquitoes from the swamp at bay.

LEOS

The LEOs of Sandgate have the responsibility of patrolling the northern section of the Wall, and of keeping dangerous creatures out of the river. They keep watch at the portcullis gate with half a dozen harpoon launchers aimed at the water, and they can get more than a little nervy when the portcullis is open. On top of that, anyone threatening to damage or disrupt the portcullis function is automatically placed under arrest and tied to a tree over-looking the river, until a LEO detachment can arrive to escort them to a stockade.

Because the University is in their purview, the LEOs also patrol the campus grounds, although because of the noises from the experiments that occur at the University these patrols are always brisk and the LEOs are glad to get them out of the way.

In order to prevent smuggling and the shipping of contraband, the LEOs have to inspect every riverboat that enters and leaves Sandgate, and a small amount of graft and corruption can occur, as long as the LEO in question is sure the shipment does not concern Daemons, etc. Most of the rank-and-file of the Novacastria LEOs know about this scam, but they have managed to keep it hidden from both Sergeant Atard and Commander Toban Bryan (see Civic).

The University

The University is comprised of only half a dozen buildings that survived the Daemornia, notably the Medical Faculty buildings, Civil Engineering, and Veterinary Science. The Engineering building has since been outfitted to also house magical research, and it is the philosophical home for both Councillor Helena, as well as the Society for Magical Purity.

The campus grounds are maintained as grassy but well cleared areas, in case of bush-fires, only loosely interspersed with blue gums and imported oak and maple trees that have managed to survive, which make the comings and goings of the place easy to spot. Due to the academic nature of the work being conducted it is a quiet place, with a feeling of serious activity being done.

The University was responsible for restoring the abilities of the John-H hospital, as well as coming up with the designs to restore the Oberon and for building ocean-going vessels in the shipyard. Various plans and projects that are being considered around the city will require the resources of the University if they are to succeed.

From a holistic point of view the University is strong in the fields of engineering and medicine, but almost non-existent in terms of the arts. The Faculty would look favourably on anyone who was willing to self-start tuition in the arts, fine arts, philosophy, or theology, and give them space to do research and get classes under way. The survivability of such a venture would be strictly based on its popularity and ability to draw students.

STUDYING EREBOS

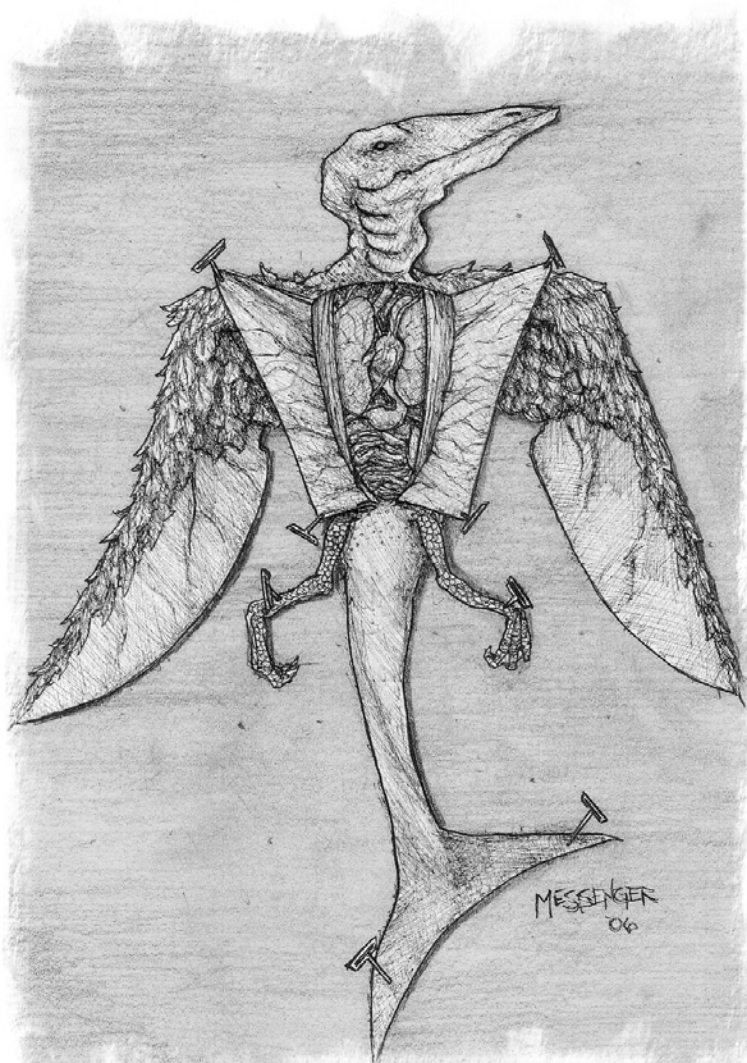
The most controversial Branch of study at the University is dedicated to understanding the nature of Erebos, the Branch of Daemonic Research. While half of the Faculty, and the city Council, believe that nothing good could come out of this, and that all it will do will be to train Dark Fanatics, the other half believes that every stone must be overturned in the search for truth. Councillor Helena is the most surprising supporter of this Branch of study, and her motives are entirely scientific.

SECRET HISTORY

The University was left surprisingly unscathed by the attacks of the Daemornia and many residents of Novacastria point to this as evidence that some kind of Daemonic research was going on at the site.

The truth is close, but slightly different. At the start of the Daemornia several Fire-Mercs were taken to the University, and when they saw how unprotected Novacastria was for an earth city, they decided to call in their Daemon masters and take the place over immediately, rather than wait for the proper invasion.

A powerful Borlin was dispatched by Erebos, to conduct experimentation on human-Daemon crossbreeds, and although it was eventually driven away by the combined forces that reclaimed the city, the Borlin had many years to perform its gruesome experiments, the most important being the creation of the Minoan-Daemonette that now lives in the abandoned Steelmills.



The Faculty

The 'Faculty' is a diverse bunch of eclectic scholars, psychics, and magic users, each one with final responsibility for the success of their 'branch' of expertise, both from a research point of view and from a marketing point of view.

Faculty members vary rarely have reason to be at crossed purposes, and disputes have always been settled without violence, and with only a little prejudice.

Although there is no formal ranking amongst the Faculty, Councillor Helena (see Civic) wields more power than most due to her political office, and she is not unwilling to exert it if she feels that the cause is just or the hypothesis valid.

The Faculty member with the second most amount of influence is Professor Heinlem, the head of Bio-research, who is always on the lookout for travellers with exotic animals and/or carcasses, preferably the former. He does not have a lot of funds, he but can repay explorers who retrieve unusual creatures by offering them the fruits of his research...

Professor Heinlem, and 'Weird Science'

The Branch of Bio-research was founded using information deciphered from Daemonic research notes left behind when the forces of Erebus were pushed out of the city. The source of these documents is kept hidden, and has been passed down by successive Heads of Bio-research, the current Head being Professor Heinlem.



The most notable difference between the Daemon's research and the research that is going on today is that the Daemons worked on humans, while Heinlem works on cross-breeding animals with other animals.



Heinlem is well aware of how his work could be perverted, and he is willing to let the information perish with him rather than risk it passing into the wrong hands.



At night the animals experiments often set up a horrible baying, or growling, that terrifies the LEOs on station, but otherwise the 'experiments' are safely secured.

Heinlem's latest project is to cross-breed common cattle with one or more of the Gondwana era mega-fauna that has returned to the land, and he is oblivious to the dangerous of working with creatures strong in Gurri magic.

Although he is philosophically opposed to the policies of the Society for Magical Purity, his meddling with Gurri powers would get him into serious trouble if any of the members of Ungawa were to find out about it. The repercussions would be severe, and might extend after death, so blackmailing him with this information is perhaps the only way he might give up any of his secrets. Luckily for him at this time no one else knows what sort of work he is currently doing, not even his assistants.

The power in the city that would be the most interested in Heinlem's work is the Minoan-Daemonette that controls the abandoned steelmills. If information related to the Daemon research that created it were to reach its ears, the fiend would tear the whole city apart just to learn Heinlem's secrets, and then it would re-enact them!

Kooragang Island

LANDMARKS Kooragang Island

The northern-most border of Novacastria, past even the abandoned steelmills, is a swampy island where industry used to desalinate water for the smelters, and leave pools of heavy-metal contaminated water under the sun for re-conditioning, before being dumped into the sea.

The place still bears the scars of what used to happen, and it is flat, dry, and sandy, with nowhere to escape the elements aside from a few LEO way-stations.

The hot air is mercifully cooled by the constant wind off the sea, but this in turn ensures that literally everything is always covered in a thin film of mostly dried salt. The only creatures that call the place home are the diseased 'Plague Birds' and billions of mosquitoes.

Ever since the Daemornia the land has primarily been of use as a means to transport heavy equipment to and from Stockton, and no one has attempted to establish a house or business.

LEOS

There are three LEO way-stations on Kooragang Island, which provide protection and escorts to land travellers either going to Stockton or daring the coast road up north.

The way-stations are lightly manned; the LEOs rotate through this posting quickly, and most of them try to end the day either at Stockton or Sandgate, where they can spend the night.

Those who have to stay overnight at a way-station secure all the entrances to the building and extinguish all the lights, fearing to attract the attention of the inhabitants of the swamps and the windmill. Of all the places that are officially part of Novacastria, this is the most remote and potentially dangerous, although monster attacks on the Island are not very newsworthy. The main reason it is kept operational is to transport heavy equipment to and from Stockton, and to act as a northern observation point of the abandoned steelmills.

The Windmill

An interesting meteorological fact is that Kooragang Island is the windiest place in Australia, and because of this it was chosen as the test site for a massive wind-power generator. After the initial tests proved successful, the site went live, although it never provided enough electricity to fuel more than a portion of the needs of the city – the steelmills, even only when partially operated, consumed a vast amount of power.

When the Daemornia reached Novacastria the propellers of the windmill were torn off by Daemons, and the place became a rookery for Nominods. After the city was freed most of the Nominods were destroyed, but a few stubbornly clung to an existence in the swamps, and eventually returned to the windmill.

The 'Plague Birds'

North of the windmill is a vast expanse of saltwater marsh than splits the two roads that lead north from Novacastria. The swamp is the home of legions of Great Plague affected storks, and other birds, that have been driven mad by the disease.

The storks have dirty-white feathers, bright blood-red eyes, and sharp black beaks that drip with a mucous that is part of their disease. They live off the swamp creatures, eating all but the largest bugs and the crocodiles, but occasionally attack people moving along the road.

At present they are in a stable situation, but if they were attacked and forced off their land there is a chance they might find a greener area, such as Civic, more to their liking. Such an event would be a catastrophe, as the birds would all have to culled, the carcasses burned, and the city cleansed.

Hexham

In geographical terms Hexham falls just outside of Novacastria, north-west of where the Wall ends at Sandgate. However, the existence of the two river bridges makes the area strategically important for controlling traffic to and from the northern coast, and for monitoring riverboat traffic along the Hunter River.

The land west of Hexham is arid and sparse, a typical bushland full of blue gums and scrub, while the area to the north and east across the Hunter River is a wetland of low reeds and rushes, that tapers off into a true swamp as it goes east.

There are no buildings here except for the single LEO station on the western side of the bridges. The wide river does not move fast enough to make any noise, so the buzzing of sand-flies, and calls of magpies and currawongs, are the only noises that break the quiet.

LEOS

The LEOs stationed at Hexham all consider it a 'hardship post' and cannot wait to transfer to somewhere else. If the sand-flies don't bite them to death during the day, the hordes of mosquitoes from the swamp will try and drain them of blood at night, and other than a quick dip in the river there is no relief from the heat because the ground is too sandy to grow sizeable trees. To make matters worse one of the bridges is haunted, and anyone trying to cross it 'disappears'.

The duty of the LEOs is to check the bona fides of travellers using the bridges, but they are lax in enforcing this. They have a secondary duty that is to raise and lower the smaller counter-weighted drawbridge, which acts as a de-facto barricade against riverboat smugglers. Even when ordered to block a vessel's passage they are often too slow to carry this out – usually because they have been bribed by the captain of the vessel, but sometimes because they drink too much during the evening and simply forget to act!

The base has not been entrusted with any firearms – they had two shotguns, which went missing – and must rely on harpoons and bows.

The Twin-Bridges

There are two bridges at Hexham. The main bridge, known as the Stone Bridge, is a concrete structure that is raised high above the water level, and which conveys all the traffic across the river to and from where the road continues north towards Forster-Tuncurry and Taree. A side-track also follows the river towards Thunderbolts Way and Stroud, but it is hardly used.

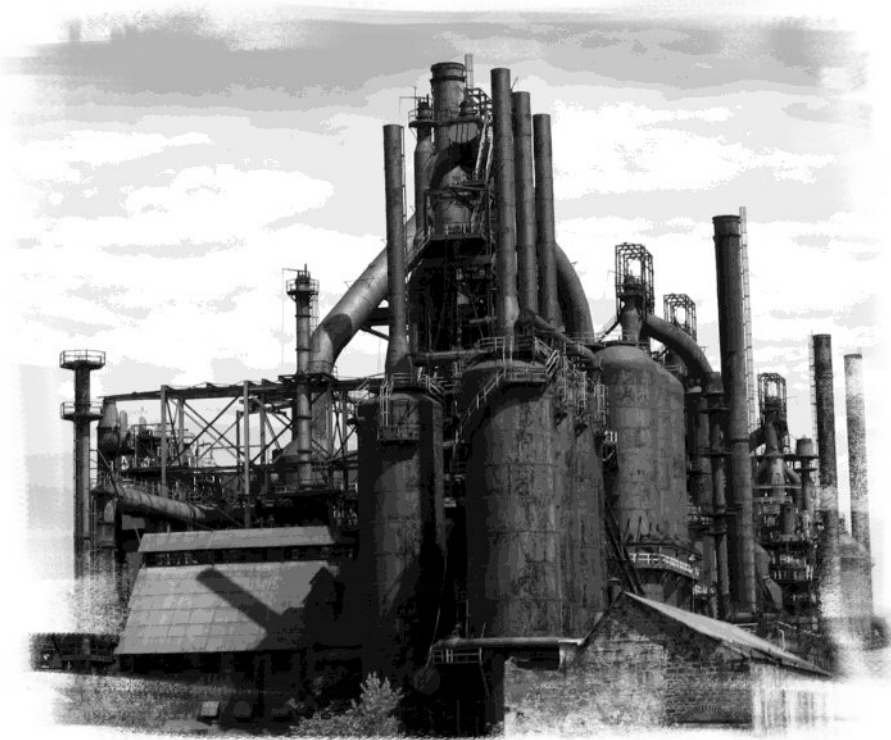
The secondary bridge is a metal draw-bridge, known as the Iron Bridge, with hooked and weighted chains recently slung underneath it. It is almost always in the raised position, and at least five of the LEOs have to leave their base and use the wheel-house on the western side of the bridge to move it either up or down.

The Iron Bridge is haunted, such that anyone who walks across it at night, from the west to the east, will 'vanish' into an enchanted mist that rises off the river, and never be seen again. The two times this has occurred onlookers thought they heard a sound like crackling flames and a Daemonic roar, just before the victim disappeared.

The haunting is due to the spirit of a greater Daemon that was bound to the bridge when the city was controlled by the forces of Erebus. The Daemons used the bridge as a gateway, not between worlds, but to a Daemonic base somewhere in the northern hemisphere. It was used infrequently, and when the Daemons lost control of the city they forgot about the gate when they found that it no longer functioned (it is raised almost all of the time to allow riverboats to pass).

If the main bridge were ever destroyed the Council would do whatever it had to exorcise the secondary bridge, and then station it with a strong LEO force that would have to raise and lower it frequently.

OUTSIDE THE CITY



Derelict Power Stations

Most of the coal and solar power stations in the Hunter Valley were destroyed by the Daemons, primarily because the stations supplied over 90% of the electricity used by Sydney.

Ruined stations can be found at Vales Point, Wangi, Munmorah, Liddell, Eraring, and Bayswater. Although inoperable, the sites are excellent sources of salvage material, such as wire, steel, medical equipment and supplies, and books full of engineering and technical knowledge.

The concrete structures have started to decay, and fire has gutted many rooms. Some rooms have not been opened since the Daemornia, and reek of coal ash, mildew, and the droppings of small rodents, and are covered by giant spider webs from wall to wall.

The Daemons never bothered to place guardians on the sites, but by their secluded nature the places attracted creatures that preferred to do their work in secret. One of the sites with intact water reservoirs has become a Ngalyod breeding ground (see History: Aboriginal to Colonial), while another has a nest of fire-Daemons from Salamander Bay living in a disused furnace. None of the sites can be considered 'easy pickings' any more, but they all offer a good salvage return to the stout of heart!

OUTSIDE THE CITY

Bulahdelah Lakes

The Lakes are a freshwater/brackish system connecting Forster-Tuncurry with Port Stephens, allowing the sea approach to be circumvented. The lakes are rarely used, and are full of fish, as well as degenerate human-troglodytes that call the place home.

Beached upon the shore of one of the lakes are the houseboats where the ancestors of the troglodytes came from, when they were initially affected with the Great Plague. The salvage value is low, except for the plastic coated maps of the east coast of Australia that remain in good condition. If explorers make their way towards the houseboats the troglodytes will let them approach, and then ambush them as they leave. The creatures are cunning, and if their victims try to escape via the bush, the monsters will pursue them wearing old water-filled pig skin bladders around their gills and mouths to keep them wet.

Wreck of the Sigma

Several decades ago Councillor Margrave hunted a sea-Daemon that lived in the wreck of this ship, about a kilometre north up the coast from Stockton. Although the monster was defeated, the wreck has since then been avoided because it took on a spooky feel, and people tend to walk more briskly past it along the beach.

The wreck is half-in and half-out of the water, and the surf breaks along its length all the time. Having been subjected to the elements for such a long period the superstructure is rusted extremely thin, and anyone walking on the deck risks falling through into the hull below, especially if they are wearing heavy armour or weigh a lot. (see Meet the Locals, for more information).



Salamander Bay (Port Stephens)

Salamander Bay is a sandy marsh land on the southern shores of the deserted Port Stephens. It is so called because it is infested with snake like Daemons that live in the fiery sand-ash mixture just back from the beach front.

A fresh water river feeds out of nearby wetlands, but apart from this, the only reason to risk Salamander Bay is a salvage mission, either to the deserted shopping complex beyond the beach, or the ghostly remains of nearby Nelson's Bay marina and shipyard, or perhaps to an abandoned vessel or wreck inside the port.

Abandoned Air Force Base

The air base at Williamtown remains a permanent feature on the coastal road to Port Stephens, before it branches off west towards Thunderbolts Way, because the slow growing bush is unable to reclaim the vast expanses of tarmac.

An unusable monument in the form of an old jet fighter sits at the entrance to the base, and half a dozen gutted 'Toreador' advanced ground-attack planes are scattered across the runway in various pieces, the scars of Daemon claws evident.

The radar tower remains where it was pulled over by the Daemon's fury and the corrugated iron hangars are rent open from above. The only building still standing is the concrete command bunker, although the inside is coated with dust – ashes from the desiccated corpses of the airmen who made their final stand against the forces of Erebos.

In summer the tarmac grows hot and sticky, so hot that in peak temperatures it will stick to the flesh and cause second-degree burns to anyone that touches it.

The atmosphere around the base is eerily still, and anyone walking across the runways will have the feeling of being observed. Even insects and birds avoid the place. This is because the Borlin who was responsible for the destruction of the airbase placed a 'Watcher' there, in case someone tried to re-establish the base.

The Watcher

The Watcher is a non-combat spirit that simply conveys everything it observes back to its master. It is fast, faster than a Dancer of Death, but not even as strong as a lowly Nominod. It is also invisible to normal sight if it chooses to be.



The spirit ceaselessly flies through the ruins and wreckage, looking for intruders and Daemonic allies alike. It has the power of speech, but is of very low intelligence. If it is approached it can convey (in Daemonic) that anything it sees and hears its master instantly knows. Whoever speaks to it speaks directly to a powerful Borlin somewhere in the cosmos!

There is no chance of the Borlin being interested in intruders onto the base, even if the Watcher is destroyed. The Daemons have much more important things to deal with,, but if anyone seeks to make a pact with it, to become a Dark Fanatic, it will send a minion to negotiate.

Caves Beach

On the coast several kilometres south of Novacastria is an old surfing hideaway. It is one of the most picturesque beaches on the coast, has good waves, and plenty of golden sand even at high tide. Even after the destruction of the Daemornia the place still rings with the cries of seagulls, and the combination of warm sun and cool water make it almost irresistible.

Caves Beach was the home to surfers, and school kids playing truant, and at night the caves that the wind had carved into the sandstone were lit by campfires and rang with the sound of music. The resurgence of Gurri magic has kindled ancient spirits that used to live in the water, and all the caves are now 'haunted' by one type of creature or another, some malevolent and some friendly. The only humans who travel here are followers of Ungawa, who are led here by elders for initiation ceremonies.

THE BLACK CAVE

The only cave that is completely avoided, even by the members of Ungawa, is the enormous Black Cave, a tidal-cave at the southern most end of the beach. The Black Cave emanates waves of coldness, even on the hottest days, but it is an unhealthy cold that brings on chills and makes those who experience it for too long turn very ill.

The White People

There existed in Gurri mythology a race of 'white people' – evil creatures with pure white skin and black almond shaped eyes – who stole babies and mutilated the bodies of those who strayed from the campfire. Now they have returned, and they have claimed the cave as their home. It is one of these creatures that has possessed Nathiel, the Lighthouse keeper (see Civic).



The evil Gurri spirits will hardly ever venture from the cave, even when the tide has completely sealed the entrance, and of course they do not need to breathe. What no one has discovered is that the monsters are actually prison-guards for something even more evil than themselves.



The 'white people' awoke with the resurgence of magic at the same time Novacastria was attacked; they were confronted in their cave by a Warlock serving Erebus and who was commanding a legion of Fire Mercs. The Warlock attacked them on sight, and the battle was furious, fire and water blasted each other and the Gurri spirits were scattered, but not before they could summon a 'tidal wave' that swept the Fire Mercs to their doom.

After the tide of the battle had turned, the Warlock found himself trapped, and the only safety to be had was to reach higher ground by going deeper into the cave.

Unloved by his Daemon masters the Warlock was never missed, and presumed dead, but he remained trapped high in the cave, keeping the 'white people' at bay but unable to get past them.

Damon Horne, Warlock

Damon has been trapped in the cave for decades. Kept alive by his unholy magic, and deprived of sunlight and real food, he is now a gnarled whitish figure starved into a skeletal parody of a man.



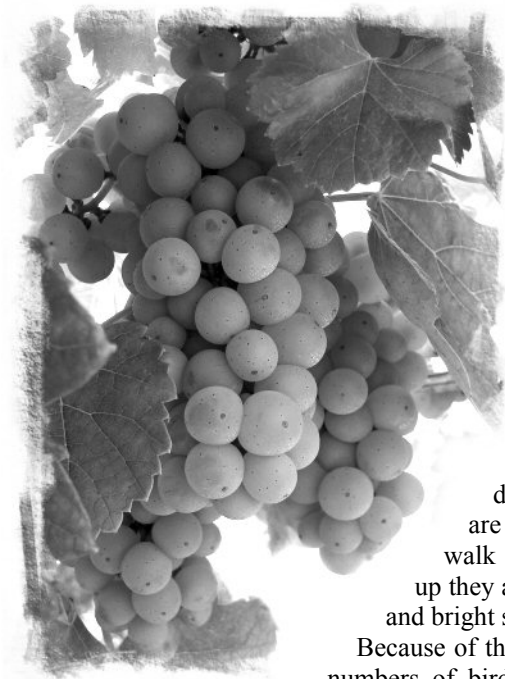
He can only be confronted if intruders first get past the 'white people', and if attacked he will fall with apparent ease, his old frame unable to withstand even the weakest blow. He would likely have a chance to summon a Fire Merc before dying, but in the wet conditions it would be easily dispatched.



However, several days after dying, even if his body is burned, he will be returned to life as a Lich-skeleton on the spot he was killed. He has devoted all of his magical power to this spell, and is relying on it to gain his freedom. If he can manage to escape he will eventually link up with the Dark Circle, and will probably learn about the Temple of Erebus that is being constructed.

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Cessnock



Built at the convergence of Bellbird Creek and Black Creek, on the road west towards Singleton, Cessnock is known for its excellent soil, good local rainfall, and wide varieties of grapes and wines.

There are no fewer than twenty vineyards in the area, and work harvesting, pruning, or planting is available year round. Water is pumped from the creeks using a series of windmills, and a horse-powered system is used for pressing the grapes.

Because of the abundance of wine the people of Cessnock have unfairly attracted a reputation for spending most of their days drunk, and react against this by working harder than the people of any other township in the Hunter. Public drunkenness is strongly discouraged, and the LEOs are quick to lock up for the evening anyone who cannot walk a straight line. When such an offender has sobered up they are usually given a punishment involving loud noises and bright sunlight.

Because of their sweet aroma, the grapes on the vine attract large numbers of birds, mainly parrots such as Cockatoos and Galahs, which have the potential to ruin the crops. This problem is exacerbated at the time of the first frost, because that is when the late harvest desert-wine grapes are at their best. The chief grape growers of Cessnock had the idea that the birds could be driven off by placing magical 'sonic wards' amongst the grapes, but unfortunately a nest of Glasvark in the area became so enraged by the noises that they few down and broke all the warding devices. The project has been put on hold until the Glasvark menace can be dealt with, something a group of 'expendable' outsiders might be hired to do.

LEOS

The LEOs at Cessnock are a very serious bunch, who constantly drill in group tactics, and are well educated and well versed in the law. With their preference for strict adherence to the letter of the law they are not staunch Alliance supporters, and consider that the Centralist would be able to run the whole valley effectively if given a chance.

Despite this stance, they vehemently detest The Crushers (see Singleton) under Colonel Lewis' command, because of their vigilante behaviour and callous disregard for the welfare of their town's fellows. However, with no bolters or high-tech weaponry to back them up, the LEOs can do nothing but make formal complaints to Colonel Lewis, and deal with any threats (Daemonic and otherwise) using more 'conventional' means.

As the most well educated LEOs in the area, they have the highest number of magic users and psykers in their ranks, although their psykers are not as powerful as those at Thunderbolts Way.

Cessnock
THE HUNTER VALLEY

Broke

On an off-shoot of the road between Cessnock and Singleton, a days travel each way, is an olive growing oasis called Broke. The soil is very similar to that which grows good grapes, but instead of wineries, the farmers in the area have established olive plantations and have been very successful.

Broke sits in one of the saddles of a low hill range, a place where the Blue Mountains are at their least prominent, and is sheltered from extreme southerly winds that might destroy the olive crops. There are several creeks in the area and it almost never runs low on water because of the high number of natural dams. Wildlife comes from far away to drink at the water sources and herds of Kangaroo and Wallaby thunder about in the fading light of dusk, stalked by Dingo, Wakaleo, and Thylacines. Ngalyod have been heard roaring at the water holes in recent years, although no locals or their domesticated animals have been taken.

The people of Broke are very independent, having faced and overcome stiff opposition from the wineries in Cessnock, they feel that they don't owe anyone anything, and are staunch supporters of the Alliance. Disliking the policies of Colonel Lewis (see Singleton) they go so far as to refuse to sell olives to anyone from Singleton, and forcibly escort LEO patrols from Singleton back across their border.

Strangers in Broke might find the land beautiful and welcoming, but until a newcomer has shown their true colours they will be treated with suspicion. The town has no inns, so all accommodation must be negotiated for with the locals, including barn-sleeping privileges, although anyone is allowed to water themselves and their mounts if they need to – in the bush no civilised person denies water to another.

LEOS

There is no formal LEO force at Broke, although every member of the community responds to fire and home alarms when a bell is rung, and most people are self sufficient enough to be able to fend for themselves. In times of emergency the town looks to its Mayor to keep them safe.

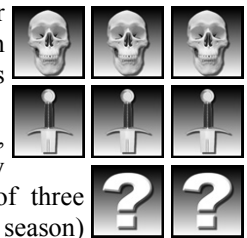
Maranda Bonn, Mayor of Broke

Maranda Bonn is an olive grower who came from Sydney as a teenager looking for a better life, and after many years earned the respect of the town and was 'elected' as Mayor (there were no formal elections, just a unanimous public consensus).

The Shimmering Creek Plantation is where Maranda lives and toils, producing some of the best olives in the region, and turning out speciality items such as pâtés, pestos, and stuffed grapes. She manages a farm of three permanent workers, and in late summer when it gets cooler (olive picking season) she puts on three or four more hands.

Now twenty-five years of age, Maranda is a comely woman, with long golden-blond hair that she keeps tied back, and kind brown eyes that have developed a piercing quality. Although technically Mayor, she puts on no graces and wears dusty old jeans around town.

Like most people Maranda has not escaped the effects of the Daemornia, and has mutations, although hers are more useful than others. A pair of large black bird (Currawong) wings protrudes from Maranda's back and her upper chest and back are covered with small downy feathers that go halfway up her neck. The wings are fully functional and she could happily soar for hours over the updrafts created by the ranges, although she considers such activities girlish and immature. Because of her mutation she cannot wear armour or clothing above the waist, although this never concerns her. Maranda has often wondered whether this mutation has anything to do with a distant Gurri relative in her bloodline, and she is respectful of Gurri people, although she will not directly assist Ungawa while that group maintains its 'sexist' male-elders-only policy.



Broke THE HUNTER VALLEY

The other important mutation Maranda has is exceptional vision, so good that when she 'activates' it she can see at night almost as well as at day. Combined, the two mutations give her an excellent tactical advantage over most adversaries, and to further help her defend the town, Apoidae (see Thunderbolts Way) has given her a psychic charm that generates a defensive shield against physical attacks for a limited duration each day.

If she has to drive a monster or unwanted visitor out of Broke, Maranda will take to the air with several javelins and a full quiver of arrows, preferably at night when a low lying mist has settled in the valley. This way she can take her time and avoid taking any risks.

Colonel Lewis of Singleton has made a mental note that Maranda will have to be 'dealt with' one day, although because of the distance from Broke to Novacastria she would not figure in his immediate plans, unless something were to dramatically change or some opportunity were to present itself. For her part Maranda is happy to keep the Crushers out of Broke, but in the back of her mind she knows that Colonel Lewis will not be content with the status quo, and that trouble is brewing.



Singleton

Singleton is a well watered area with good soil and is the hub of cotton, and thus canvas production in the Valley. The people who live around the township are reasonably happy with the way that their 'Mayor' runs things. Law and order is strong, if overly rigid, and crimes such as murder are almost unheard of.

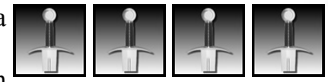
The LEOs who keep the peace in Singleton are all members of Colonel Lewis' private war band known as The Crushers. These men are expertly trained in open-field and urban combat, although they are weak in terms of bushcraft and special-forces training.

They take their duties seriously, knowing that they need the support of their home-town in order to have a safe base of operations. When they overstep the mark, as is inevitable given their aggressive military training, the Colonel is forced to make reparations to the victim and to have the LEO(s) who broke the law publicly flogged.

The inspection of people and cargo in and out of the town is vigorous, and what the locals do not realise is that it is part of the Colonel's secret counter-insurgency plans.

Colonel Lewis

It is an odd thing that an ardent Centralist is in charge of a valley town like Singleton, but although he always nominates himself in the Novacastrian elections, and orders his war-band to vote for him, his overtly militaristic agenda stops him from securing enough of the city vote to ever win a Council seat.



The Colonel is a tall, strong man, possessed of a mutant strength and prone to falling into a rage in the heat of a fight. He has blonde-brown hair and a deeply sun-tanned complexion, and he often hides his blue eyes behind the reflective visor of an old and beaten combat helmet. In the heat of summer he walks around the barracks with his dress-shirt off, and his troops marvel at the number of blade, claw, and gun-shot scars he has. On formal occasions, or political rallies, he wears a suit of well pressed army-khaki greens that he reserves for such occasions.



The Colonel's favourite weapons are a Steyr-Aug rifle in one hand, and a Daemonically enchanted hammer in the other. He wears a heavy breastplate in addition to his combat helmet, and carries the standard of The Crushers on his back, like a nobori called by ancient samurai.

The hammer was taken from a Daemonic foe that the Colonel dispatched with a bullet between the eyes, but he has no idea that it is a sentient item, and has slowly been fuelling his ego and rage. If someone were to take the hammer from him he would fall into an endless rage, and without an obvious target he would lash out at anything and everything. The clutches of the hammer's spirit could be withdrawn from his mind via an exorcism, but it would be a dangerous process, requiring that the spirit of the hammer be made manifest, and for Colonel Lewis to be convinced to destroy it – a venture fraught with the risk of failure.

Because of his lack of political success, the Colonel has decided that a coup de' etat is the only way to achieve his aims. In order to ensure secrecy in planning, he has strengthened the border patrols and inspections, and the LEOs have a standing order to report anything suspicious directly to him.

He has been receiving reports 'leaked' by Councillor Redgrave, about a growing Daemon problem in the abandoned steelmills, and has anticipated that this may be the trigger that allows him to enter the city as its protector and subsequently establish martial law. After that the assimilation of the townships into the Centralist agenda would be all but assured. The Colonel believes that he is a tactical genius, which he is, but his strategic thinking is weak and he is an easy pawn for the Dark Circle to manipulate. In this respect, the Daemonic hammer he wields also plots against him.

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Singleton



THE HUNTER VALLEY

Muswelbrook

‘The Crushers’

Taking as their emblem the crossed Steyr-Aug rifle and Hammer, when not on duty each trooper makes no pretences about being anything other than a private soldier for the Colonel.

The Crushers have made forays all around the Hunter Valley, usually under the guise of pursuing some Daemon or another, but mostly for the purpose of ransacking abandoned caches of tools, seeds, or whatever they can lay their hands on.

Should they encounter a group of explorers engaged in salvage they are more than happy to force the group to back off and leave the ‘harvest’ to them. The Colonel rarely takes part in these excursions, in an effort to keep his public image clean, but in private he condones, authorises, and even plans them, going so far as to ensure that he has alibi’s worked out if something goes wrong.

If they need to make a full-scale assault The Crushers can muster together seven HK-P7 pistols, and thirty eight Steyr-Aug rifles with currently enough ammunition to last about two full days of field-combat. For rapid deployment they have a stable of twenty-five horses. There are also enough melee weapons, and sets of medium-heavy armour and shields, to outfit the entire group.

Regardless of equipment, whether at range or in melee, a ‘Crush-trooper’ is easily the superior of any civilian, and better than most LEOs, fighters and guardsmen. Once the quality of their equipment is accounted for, they are the most effective human fighting force in the Hunter Valley, even more effective than the combined LEO force in Novacastria.

The full strength of the Battalion is four companies of thirty men each, plus a command company of fifteen signallers, spies, and runners.

Muswelbrook

The town of Muswelbrook is as far north and as far west as anyone recognises the Hunter Valley. It is the closest location to the old Liddell and Bayswater power stations, although these are deserted now (see Outside the City).

Muswelbrook is high above sea level, and although the weather can become very hot in summer, at night-time it is bitterly cold and the earth can freeze the feet through normal footwear. The locals all have combustion stoves that they use for both heating and cooking, some elegant in design, and some no more that two forty-gallon drums bolted together with fire in one and water in the other.

The townsfolk of Muswelbrook are ‘country people’ in a sense that most other dwellers of the Hunter don’t fully comprehend. They keep their distance when talking to each other, assume that anyone trying to get up close and in their face is being obnoxious and aggressive, but they will lend a hand to anyone in genuine need with no questions asked.

Muswelbrook exists, given its isolation, because it has wide, flat grassland that is devoid of rodents, making it the perfect spot for breeding horses. There are about three thousand head of horse spread across the region, most grazing freely, requiring to be rounded up for breaking-in and sale.

Due to the nature of ancient horse-breeding practises, the equestrian gene-pool was very limited, and when they were infected by the Great Plague it was not unusual for horses to suffer severe and mostly malignant mutations. This worrying trend has continued, and roughly one in two foals now born in Muswelbrook has to be put down due to a serious defective mutation. The only ranch that manages to beat these odds is the ‘Broken O’ ranch, run by Johon Bircher.

LEOS

There are two-dozen well trained LEOs in Muswelbrook, most of them fighters, although they always try to have a magic user and a psyker on roster if possible. Anyone who wants to be a LEO has to prove that they are a more than competent rider, and most of them do this by entering and winning the combative equestrian events at Novacastria Stadium. Amongst the LEOs archery is given more importance than marksmanship, because they have very limited firearms – only a single antique shotgun with very little ammunition, an old sporting pistol, and a sporting air-rifle.

The Muswelbrook Gift

Almost a decade ago, the ranchers got together and developed a way of testing the mettle of their horsemen, without having to travel to Novacastria to compete in the Stadium. The Muswelbrook Gift has since become the most prestigious (and dangerous) horse race of the southern hemisphere, a gruelling two week journey that tests the limits of both riders and their steeds. This is not an event that is to be taken lightly, or without thorough preparation.

Riders start from Muswelbrook and ride directly north for several days, passing three ruined towns on their way and keeping the Barrington Tops on their right until they reach a deserted town called Murrurundi. Then they veer west and head towards the desert country riding for almost a week through dangerous scrubland until they reach the poorly populated town of Dubbo. At Dubbo they follow the Macquarie River south east until they reach the Rylestone tributary, and then they have to make an overland dash to where the Hunter River has one of its beginnings, and then follow the Hunter up-river back to Muswelbrook.

The journey tests not only horsemanship, but bushcraft, combat, and stealth skills, as well as navigation and, quite often, first aid skills. It is a time when any friends earned or enemies gathered are likely to make themselves known, because each rider will be highly vulnerable at one or more stages of the race.

Of the dozen or so riders who start the race each year, only two or three complete it successfully, and sometimes up to half of them perish in the attempt. The winner of the race receives substantial prize money, a horse of their choice from the district, and is invariably invited to ride for the LEOs or one of the ranches.

Most importantly, all those who finish the race are entitled to call themselves 'Gifted' riders, and most horsemen will know what that means and show such riders great respect. To ensure that this title is recognised, the riders are offered the opportunity to be 'branded' with the symbol of the race – an inverted horseshoe around the letter 'M', and the last two digits of the year of the race.

The 'Broken O'

The Broken O is the biggest ranch and horse stud in Muswelbrook, claiming several valleys and almost nine hundred horses, and employing a dozen stockmen on a permanent basis. Stockmen from the O regularly compete and win races at the Stadium, and some are also part time LEOs.

The farmstead at the O is a huge place, recently constructed from pine harvested from the surrounding forests, and is big enough to house the owner, the stockmen and their families, and it even has hostel accommodation for travellers and seasonal workers.

Rumours abound as to why the Broken O produces less defective mutants than other ranches, and the owner says it is all due to his expert judge of breeding stock and careful management of the gene pool.

Johon Bircher, Rancher and Horse-Racer

Johon Bircher is the owner of the Broken O, an ambitious man in his early forties who has never married and has no children. His entire life is horse breeding and horseracing, and he won the first 'Gift' held and has the brand to prove it. When he was younger he also served as a LEO, before establishing a ranch with the money he had saved up.

He is a supporter of the Alliance, and the person with the most sway in Muswelbrook politics, and he shares the aims of other ranchers more often than not. He dislikes the 'antics' of Colonel Lewis, because his stockmen are always having run-ins with Crusher patrols, and unlike other Alliance members he does not passively accept the situation and would actively support anyone who wanted to remove the Colonel from power – provided that they were first able to prove themselves capable of such an undertaking.

Muswelbrook THE HUNTER VALLEY



THE HUNTER VALLEY

Muswelbrook

Truginji and Meilini

Truginji and Meilini are twin sisters born to a Gurri stockman whose family has worked the Broken O for several generations. They were born blessed by Biame (the Gurri creator spirit) and are easily able to work magic that many Gurri elders struggle with. Why they were born this way is still a mystery.



What no one but the sisters and Johon Bircher know is that they are the Broken O's secret weapon in the battle against ridding the horse herds of mutations. They are able to cast protective wards over mating studs and mares, which reduce the chance of a detrimental mutation from one in two, down to one in three-and-a-half. Over a ranch the size of the Broken O this provides a serious economic boost, and will eventually eradicate genetic mutations completely.



Because they have been spoilt by both the gods, their parents, and Johon Bircher, the sisters act like brats most of the time, playing like children while everyone else is out working. They also tease and flirt with the stockmen and travellers through the area, and no one is game to reprimand them.

Despite their powerful magic the fact that they are women bars them from ever being elders in Ungawa, so they are scornful of anyone who belongs to the organisation, going so far as to place annoying hexes upon them as long as they remain in Muswelbrook. Only a renunciation of Ungawa and/or their sexist leadership structure will endear the girls to victim enough for them to lift the hexes.

Both sisters are now nineteen years of age, slim and athletic, with long curly black hair, and dark, dark eyes that literally sparkle with magic. They are in perfect health and have never been sick their entire lives. They know that they are attractive, and exploit the fact mercilessly, much to the dismay of the long-suffering stockmen at the ranch.



Taree

Taree THE HUNTER VALLEY

Taree is the northern-most inland township that is still part of the Hunter, and is prosperous in terms of wool and cotton production, and a few inland trout hatcheries.

Once a year musicians from Sydney and the Hunter converge on the town for the annual Taree Music Festival. Lewis Drum (see Stroud) is often a feature act at the festival, although his macabre taste in music prevents him from taking the popularity-based awards.

Access to Taree from the south is across Manning River, over the Martin bridge, an old eleven-pylon concrete and iron bridge now showing advanced signs of concrete cancer and rust, but still highly useable.

As the last major settlement heading north up the North Coast, travellers are strongly advised to turn southward and anyone coming out of the north will be reported to the LEOs to be immediately investigated.

LEOS

The LEOs who patrol Taree are all locals, mostly young men who thought that being a LEO would be more exciting than owning a farm, but who are slowly beginning to catch on to their mistake.

The senior LEO is Gef Manning, descendant of the settlers who established the area in the Colonial period, who prefers to delegate out most of his duties and spend his days fishing on the river that bears his family name.

When called to action the LEOs are able to field half a dozen World War II .303 rifles, with less than a dozen rounds each, but are increasingly reliant on crossbows and spears. The most action the LEOs see is as a fire-fighting service, keeping the town safe during bushfire season and burning fire-breaks in the winter.

The Festival

Once a year, during late summer, Taree becomes the cultural and musical centre for everyone living north of Sydney, and over a hundred performers and thousands of music lovers make the pilgrimage to the banks of the Manning River. Half come by land, which is a long and dusty trip, and the other half have the luxury of sailing up the coast and rowing up-river.

The festival lasts a week, and after six days the punters register their votes with the organisers, and the winning artists are announced for each category (best guitar, best singer, best non-human, and best-and-fairest). Each winner receives a gold statue of a guitar, which if they wish can be exchanged with the organisers for an equivalent amount in coins (it saves the organisers getting new statues minted each year). All participants are likely to pick up gigs and contracts if they are good enough not to be booed off stage.

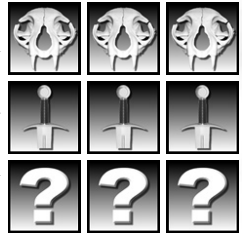
The most infamous venue at the festival is called 'Johno's' and it is nothing more than a tarpaulin clad marquee, but it has a reputation for drawing the best musicians and selling the coldest beverages. Because of its proximity to the Manning River, fights that erupt in the tent are quickly thrown into the river by the patrons, so that tempers are able to cool down. Unfortunately, the water may not be safe at the next festival...

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Thunderbolts Way

'Freak Show Alley'

The Dark Circle has plans to subvert the next festival, luring a sea-Daemon up the Manning River by defiling the river with the corpse of a desecrated animal or person. To succeed in luring a beast as far inland as Taree they would need to hide their 'bait' in the water for at least a week, and in the mean time it would attract other 'nasties' to the area.



A group of Dark Fanatics from the Novacastria shantytowns has been chosen for this duty, masquerading as a troupe of circus/street performers. The head Fanatic is a magical-contortionist called Jaget, who can infiltrate any area, even if only a few inches wide. Jaget will be responsible for finding a victim, and hiding the corpse somewhere safe, and he will have to check on it several times before the mission is over.

Backing him is a cunning psychic-fortune teller called Rosda, who attacks her victims in their dreams, leaving them tired and listless during the day, when the group's shape shifter can overpower them. Rosda claims that she can 'drive away evil spirits', but in fact the more she talks to a person the more she learns about them, and the more effective her psychic attacks become.

Vlado-the-grim was born cursed with so many types of were-diseases that he may not even be human (he may in fact be a were-human), and he is a master at changing forms to please the crowds, or to maximise his effectiveness in combat. The one form he will never show in public is that of a powerful Daemon lord. He is not really a Daemon, but the form is terrifyingly convincing and most people back down or surrender rather than fight it.

Thunderbolts Way

The township of Thunderbolt's Way lies at the southern end of a century's old disused road that crossed the middle-upper Hunter region, leading to Stroud and the Barrington Tops. It was named in memory of a famous bushranger who called the area home during his notorious 'career'.

Originally part of the wool growing drive during the Colonial era, access was always by riverboat, which ported goods down the Karuah River to Port Stephens. The Hunter-Karuah river connection was build pre-Daemornia as part of a water management scheme, allowing direct access to Novacastria bypassing Port Stephens. Now that road travel is dangerous the riverboat is once again the best mode of travel. Because it is a relatively slow moving river, the trip takes roughly a day, either up-stream or down-stream.

Thunderbolts Way is the safest Hunter Valley township to live in, because of the unique nature of its local fauna (see The Bee-Tamers), although this cannot be translated into an expeditionary force. Firearms are also banned in the town, either wearing or displaying them.

The Way does not employ LEOs in any capacity, and the township's self-sufficiency is a thorn in the plans of the Centralists, because the Way also acts as a shield for both Stroud and the Tops.

The Bee-Tamers

Centuries ago, the area was known for the quality of honey it produced. When the Great Plague came it wiped out most of the local wildlife, but combined with the infusion of Gondwana oriented magic into the area, the local wild honey bees were mutated into creatures the size of tennis balls.

The survivors in the area turned their bee-keeping skills towards harvesting the honey of these new mutants, but failed to do so, even with magic, until a travelling Psyker visited the township and was able to make psychic contact with the 'hive mind'. Ever since that visit the 'Bee-Tamers' of Thunderbolts Way have trained as Psykers.

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Thunderbolts Way

Because even the basic exchange of information between two honeybees constitutes intelligent communication, even junior Bee-Tamers (and other psychics) are able to exert some control over the bees. Experienced Bee-Tamers also act as the LEOs for the town, and are able to walk around the town covered by swarms of giant bees, or repel attacks by marauding creatures. Because some animals and monsters are able to by-pass the bee-defence, Bee-Tamers must also train in either psychic or physical combat. The Bee-Tamers have no firearms, and wearing or displaying firearms in Thunderbolts Way is against the law.

Head Bee-Tamer, Apoidae

Apoidae is an elderly woman, descended from a long line of Bee-Tamers and beekeepers from the old days. Although unmarried she has raised several children, all of whom are now also Bee-Tamers, and doing so has taught her to be calm and gentle when dealing with unusual situations, the same way her bees calmly drown invading insects in honey if their hive is attacked.

At seventy years of age, Apoidae has long white-grey hair and well sun-tanned skin. Her blues eyes are starting to cataract over, but she has discovered that as long as she has some of her bee-friends nearby she can read their minds and see through their eyes! Having an extraordinary mental strength, Apoidae is easily both the leader, and the champion, of the Bee-Tamers.

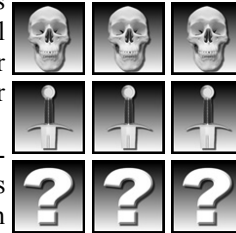
In her communing with the queens of her beehives, Apoidae has learned that a 'dark tree' has begun to 'grow' within the valley. What the bees are referring to is the construction of the Temple

of Erebos, which although they have never encountered it, has begun to affect the plants throughout the valley.

Thunderbolts Way is also the closest township to the Temple, which is why it has been sensed there and not elsewhere. If explorers come to Thunderbolts Way and Apoidae senses that she can trust them, she will offer to hire them (for coin and/or raw honey) to find the 'dark tree'. She will even send along one of her children and a bee-swarm as protection (the bees will live for about four weeks during winter, and ten weeks during summer, before dying).

If she thinks the explorers cannot be trusted she will make them the same offer, without any assistance, and if they refuse she will order them expelled southward.

Apoidae is also one of the only people the Survivalists (see Barrington Tops) will treaty with, because they know she helps protect them. However, even Apoidae is not offered their hospitality.



MESSENGER 06

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Forster-Tuncurry, Stroud

Forster-Tuncurry

On the northern-most point of what is considered to be the 'Upper Hunter' are two closely linked townships, on opposite sides of a clear emerald waterway. Until recently, the towns were so united that people referred to them by the one name of 'Forster-Tuncurry'.

Joined by a bridge that spans Cape Hawke Harbour, which feeds into Wallis Lake and all the way to Port Stephens, the dual townships have historically shared everything from sporting teams, to sewage and telephone systems. The Daemornia changed all that.

Because of the safe harbour, and the fact that the towns escaped Daemonic destruction, the bridge became a source of revenue for the local government. Merchants travelling over the bridge, and boats passing beneath it, all had to pay a 'bridge tax'.

The money was distributed equitably, until a decade ago when the unscrupulous mayor, who lived in Forster, decided to spend most of the collected taxes on improving his side of the bridge.

The situation persisted, until a Tuncurry mayor was chosen at the next election, but who proved over-zealous in making sure that Tuncurry got back what it was owed... with interest! The political climate see-sawed across the bridge, with rumours that the whole problem was sparked by Daemonic Fanatics, and the political moderates losing ground each time.

Eventually one of the mayoral elections was so close that the loser, the former mayor of Tuncurry, declared it rigged and marched onto the bridge with a local band of vigilantes, and claimed the bridge in the name of Tuncurry.

The local LEO force was split in half and chaos reigned for a while. The residents of Forster attacked the bridge, and secured the eastern on-ramp, while the forces of Tuncurry had to retreat from the exposed bridge and back onto the western bank. That was a year ago.

With the loss of revenue both towns have deteriorated, and locals have resorted to robbing boats at anchor just to eke out a living. Merchants now fear crossing the bridge, knowing that they will be charged an exorbitant 'bridge tax' at both sides, so most now avoid the area, and trade in and out of Taree has suffered as a result.

The cessation of hostilities and restoration of trade is of importance to both the Centralists and the Alliance, although they would seek this by very different means.

Stroud

The land around Stroud was relatively unscathed by the Great Plague. The people exhibit few mutations and the soil grows strong, with healthy crops. There are almost a hundred farms surrounding the township, and wagons of agricultural produce leave for the Thunderbolt Way riverboats daily.

For both the Centralists and the Alliance the township is a valuable resource and one that neither of them want to see come to any harm. Unfortunately, the instability caused by disrupting Stroud's output is too much of a temptation for the followers of Erebus, and the Dark Circle is drawing together plans to infiltrate the township with Daemonettes and infect the area with a new strain of the Great Plague. Most of this planning and the gathering of resources will be done in the newly constructed Temple.

Most nights of the week Stroud is busy with passing merchants, and growers and graziers now come to town to do business and have fun. During the day the town is sombre and a model of commercial and agricultural success.

LEOS

The town's Chamber of Commerce, who are all ardent supporters of the Alliance, maintains a strong contingent of LEOs in Stroud. In keeping with the structure of traditional LEO operations there is no appointed 'head' LEO; the Chamber simply appoints rosters of tried and trusted officers to perform a set schedule of duties. This could be exploited as a weakness, due to the lack of oversight, but it also ensures an incorruptible LEO force dedicated to nothing but public order.

The Commercial Rest-House

As the nexus of agricultural trade for the north of the Hunter valley, and the focus of major export arrangements, the township of Stroud offers one of the few genuine rest-houses available north of Novacastria.

The 'Commercial' rest-house has a patronage that surpasses that of most city based inns and taverns, because it is a meeting place for both locals and travellers alike. The local draught is a popular honey-mead from Thunderbolts Way, and the publicans, an ex-grazier family called the Gloucesters, always leave a room spare for any of the Bee-Tamers from the Way who are passing through.

Travellers of all artistic and musical ability are invited to perform at the Commercial for a 'whip-around' (passing a hat through the crowd in appreciation) which will enable all but the worst performers to buy a room and meal for the night.

Local rumours are spread around the Commercial that the servants of Erebos are using it as a meeting spot to coordinate their activities in the Hunter, which most of the locals strongly disapprove of. Unfortunately, it has led to several unsavoury incidents where unknown travellers were mistakenly attacked by the local mob under suspicion of supporting Erebos. The LEOs always break these fights up, and a recent fatality to a local traveller has put them on edge. .

Lewis Drum, singer-songwriter

One of the biggest draw-cards at the Commercial is the guitar player and song-writer Lewis Drum, who performs several nights of the week, and even travels to Novacastria to perform for wealthy patrons.

Despite the money Lewis gets in the city he prefers the country and the rural folk and their lack of airs. Lewis once performed at the start of a local Bladehockey match at the Stadium, where he made a political statement of his support for the Alliance, and he stills receives a cool welcome at the start of any performance there. When he has to go to the city, he stays in a shantytown hostel, where the local residents appreciate that he plays for them and repay this by leaving him alone and/or acting as his protectors.

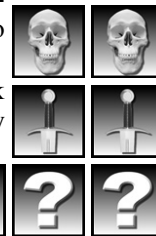
Lewis is a tall man, but skinny, with long brown hair, and he was born with bone-prongs that he occasionally extends and uses as part of his 'improvised bluegrass bone-picking style'. In public he always wears a grey akubra (cowboy-style hat) and button-down shirt, and compliments this with dark aviator sunglasses.

Despite his convictions, Lewis' music has nothing political in it, and is purely orientated towards his gothic-blues style. He employs his powerful voice to haunting effect, and the themes of the music reflect love, desire, black-magic, surrealism, and ghostly tales. When he performs he tends to go into a trance, and in summer the sweat drips off his the brim off his hat, steadily replaced by nothing but honey-mead. Locals rumour that he is a psychic and that he actually channels the dead while performing.

What no one except Lewis and Councillor Helena in Novacastria (see Civic) know is that Lewis has thrown his lot in with the Alliance and acts as a spy and messenger between the city and the rest of the valley. His travels take him everywhere except Barrington Tops, and he also performs at functions held by city Councillors, where he receives orders from Helena and hands over any information he has picked up. Lewis maintains his cover by also performing for wealthy Centralist patrons, while actually spying on their gatherings and functions.

If Lewis finds anyone who professes to be a recruit to the Alliance cause he will not approach them directly, but instead ask Helena to contact them and test them with a mission. Because he is in contact with Apoidae in Thunderbolts Way he knows about the 'dark tree' growing somewhere in the valley, and he always keeps his eyes and ears open for signs of Erebos anywhere. If his spying ever gets him into trouble, his friends (including Helena and Apoidae) will hire people to find and help him.

THE HUNTER VALLEY Stroud



Barrington Tops

Barrington Tops is the name given to the highest 'hills' in the north-western valley area, although they could also be described as small mountains. They are high enough that the peaks remain cool in the summer, and the vegetation is both bushland as well as alpine.

There are many caves carved out of the local sandstone by the elements, and the animals are plentiful, including feral horses and deer. The only road in and out of the Tops is from Stroud, and the distrustful locals keep a sharp watch for any visitors.

The Survivalists

The Survivalists are the remnants of pseudo-religious group that fled from Sydney and established a base in the Tops during the Daemornia. There were originally other families living on the Tops, but fearing that they could not trust them, the Survivalists killed them all – an event that the current generation of Survivalists finds difficult to understand and reconcile with their history.

Although lacking in magical or psychic prowess, every member of the group is an expert at living off the land, as well as tracking and evasion. Strangely, the mutations that have affected the rest of humanity have not been random amongst the Survivalists, and almost all of them are orientated around improved physical ability or tactical advantages, such as agility, night-vision, bone-prongs, or camouflage.

Their biggest problem is that they remain suspicious and distrustful of outsiders, and especially suspicious that their not-so-perfect history might be brought to light. Although there would be no one to bring repercussions against them, the shame of the knowledge frightens them.

When encountered in the bush it will usually be because the Survivalists choose to be found, and that is most likely to happen when they want to scare someone away. One member of the group will allow themselves to be seen, covered in natural camouflage pigments, carrying a wooden bow and probably a large metal knife, or a poison-tipped blow-dart. They will signal that the trespassers turn around and leave in no uncertain terms, but without engaging in conversation.

THE STONE FROG

The leaders of the Survivalists have passed down the secret location of a massive stone frog that they understand to be strong in magic, on the northern flank of the Barrington Tops. The stone frog is actually a manifestation of the Gurri spirit called Tiddalik that was awakened after the Daemornia (see History: Aboriginal to Colonial) and it is believed that at certain times it is both living and able to move.

Although Tiddalik has destroyed many interlopers into its territory, it has chosen to recognise the bond the Survivalists have formed with the land and it leaves them in peace. If the Survivalists were ever destroyed, the frog spirit would hunt down the killers and, as long as they were still in the bush and not in a town or city. Tiddalik would crush them to death and grind their bones in its stony mouth, spitting the remains onto the ground, where the bodies of the Survivalists would rise, reborn out of the mud.

The Survivalists have no idea they have such a protector, and probably wouldn't believe it if they were told. Although Tiddalik will not resurrect anyone else, it will allow the followers of Ungawa to pass safely through its land.

If a way can be found to move Tiddalik while the spirit is in statue form (which depends on the phases of the moon), it will re-settle into any other bush or swampland and could prove a powerful anti-demonic guardian.

Exocet and Harm

Twins, and triplets, are very common among the Survivalists, and because of the group's communal nature they often appoint such siblings as concurrent leaders. Presently, Exocet and Harm are the leaders of the Survivalists; brother and sister, both are experts in bushcraft, tracking, foraging, and ambush techniques, and are territorial when dealing with the unknown.

Exocet was born minutes before his sister, and physically they are very much alike. Both have dark black hair, and dark brown eyes, lean bodies with muscles like whipcord, and elongated fangs that they inherited from their father.

Where they differ the most is how they handle new situations. Exocet at first appears to be approachable, almost friendly for a Survivalist if the situation warrants, although secretly he is always planning ways to 'dispatch' any intruders among the group. Harm is different in that she is initially overtly hostile, displaying typical aggressive behaviour (such as snarling, slashing feints with knives, etc.), but she also has a natural curiosity that eventually overcomes her hostility. It was Harm who persuaded Exocet that they should establish a treaty with Apoidae, the head Bee-Tamer of Thunderbolts Way, and she is the one most likely to listen to warnings about dangers in the area.

THE HUNTER VALLEY

Barrington Tops



THE HUNTER VALLEY

The Temple of Erebos

The Temple of Erebos



Because they believe that rashness has caused the undoing of so many of their brethren Fanatics, the Dark Circle in Novacastria has planned and executed the construction of the temple to their god in painstaking secrecy.

The first step that Councillor Redweigh and other supporters of Erebos took was to locate a strong Gurri tree spirit (a huge Stringy Bark gum tree) in a part of the Hunter Valley that was untravelled. Over a period of years they tempted and seduced the tree spirit, until they had corrupted it with blood sacrifice, and it had no option but to side with Erebos. After that, the construction of the Temple could begin.

The secrecy continued, and the gateway to the Temple was so secret that in fact it did not exist! At least not during the day...

Redweigh used the magic of his Daemonic allies to infused the body of the tree with a gate spell, that caused it to shift 'out of phase' when in sunlight. Every night the tree re-appears in its hidden location, and every sunrise it shifts into a nightmare land inhabited by Daemons (possibly near Lake Acheron?)

To guard the temple during the day, two Fanatics have been chosen for their mutant wings, and set to watch from the branches of the tree. They are armed with Inferno Orbs, and keep a lookout for intruders during the night, but return inside the Temple before sunrise.

THE HUNTER VALLEY

The Temple of Erebos

The tree is incredibly spooky to look upon, with its bark now hanging off it almost like cobwebs. However, although the tree is important to the Dark Circle, it is not actually the Temple itself. During the day the tree can be entered via a fire-blackened cleft in its side, and human and Daemon sized creatures can follow a carved stairway down one of its gigantic roots, which opens into a concrete bunker that is the Temple proper. During day time, when the tree is out of phase, all occupants are trapped inside the Temple whether they want to be there or not. Teleportation spells still work in and out of the Temple, but only if the user knows where they are and where the Temple is.

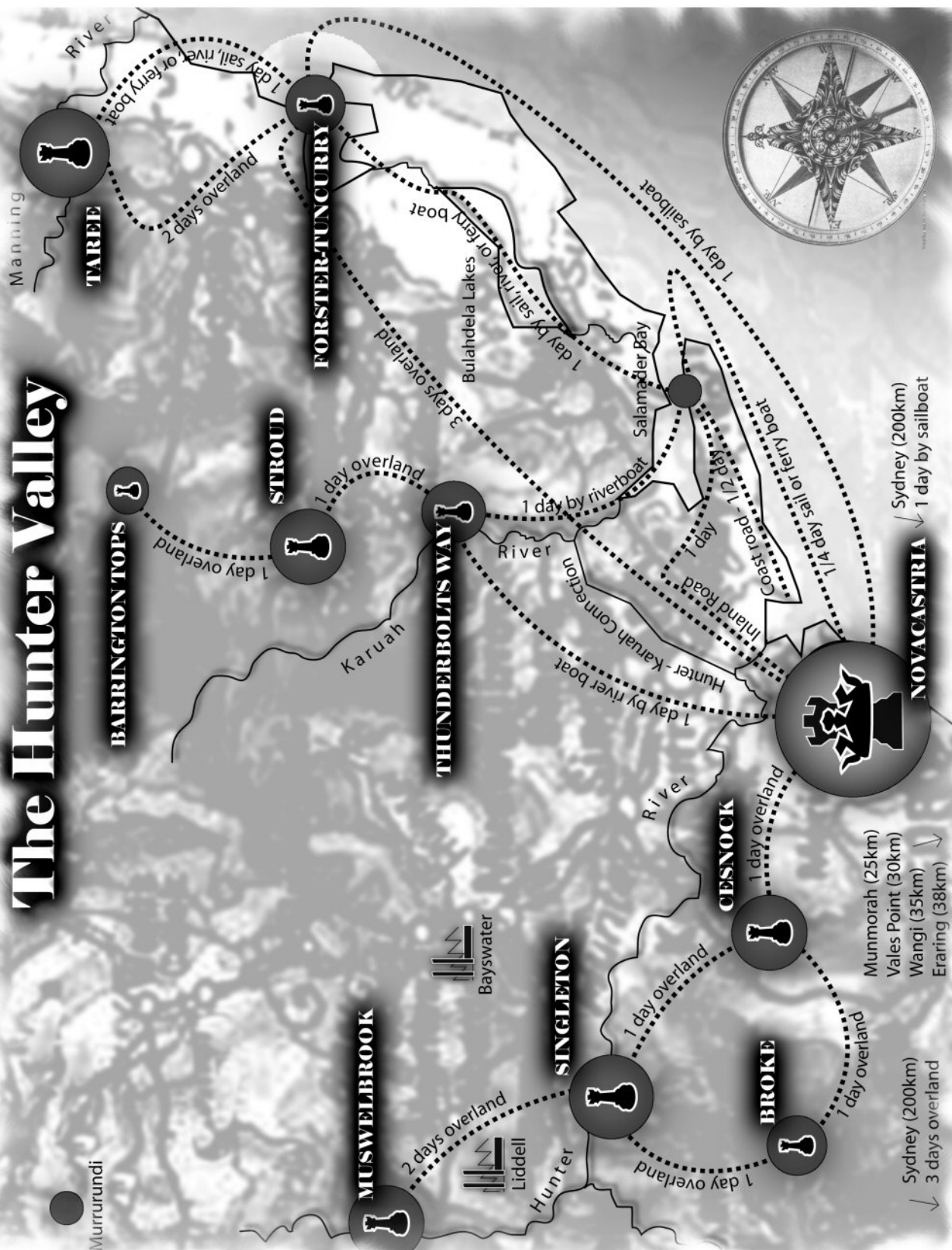
The first thing that greets those entering the Temple, besides the rank stench of decayed flesh and tree-mould, is a wall with three archways. Each archway has a façade above it, the left one depicting Erebos, the central one depicting the Judges of Hades, and the right-hand one depicting General Kaol. Each sunrise there is a different clue magically written in the stonework as to which doorway is safe to use. The clue is easy to work out, although it is written in Daemonic. Choosing the correct archway leads safely into the Temple, but the wrong archway opens up a pit trap to the lair of a Giant Scorpion.

The Temple is a series of roughly carved circular rooms, each one intersecting with the room(s) adjacent to it so that there are no doors. Each room houses a particular 'project' – be it Undead creation, constructing Daemonic devices, creating new cross-breeds, or torturing victims of the Dark Circle.

The Dark Circle will guard the whereabouts of their Temple with the utmost care. They never travel to it alone, but in strong groups. Only those who have been with the Dark Circle for years, and have been witnessed committing atrocious acts in the name of Erebos, will be entrusted with the knowledge of its location. Some minions never learn where the Temple is, and only ever travel there via the magic of their masters.

The last room in the Temple is mysteriously empty – except that painted across the entire wall, in undrying Daemon-blood, are the words 'Awaken the Hunter', in Daemonic. This was written by the Borlin that created the Minoan-Daemonette in the old steelmills, but no one from the Temple has yet proven worthy enough to understand what it means, so the Borlin has kept the secret to itself. Councillor Redweigh sometimes spends solitary hours in this room, pondering the writing, but without knowledge of what lurks in the steelmills he is only guessing. What will happen when the Borlin's riddle is solved probably depends upon who solves it. Not even the Borlin who wrote the riddle knows that it also relates to an ancient Gurri legend, and that there is more than one 'hunter' in the valley (see Meet the Locals).



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THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN NOVACASTRIA

The 'Australian Rules' Bladehockey

The 'Aussie Rules' variant of Bladehockey follows the internationally accepted rules in many respects, and is not so different that it hampers Australian players who want to play overseas. However, visiting teams often receive a rude surprise when they learn about the local rules.

Rule 1 – The Oval

Instead of playing on a rectangular field, the game is played on an oval shaped pitch of equivalent surface area. This encourages speed and offensive tactics over defence.

Rule 2 – No armour!

No player is allowed to wear armour, or compete wearing any kind of body protection, including medical casts or splints, but not including bandages for injuries which have been incurred playing an officially sanctioned game.

Rule 3 – Irregular puck

It takes greater skill to score with an irregular 'oval' shaped puck, and all teams are equally challenged in this way. The shape of the puck is a metaphor for the uncertainty of life, and that sometimes, despite your best efforts, things don't always go as planned. It also introduces an element of chance into a game that would otherwise be straightforward.

Rule 4 – Six point goals

Scoring a goal as normal awards six points, instead of just one point.

Rule 5 – Points for trying

Surrounding the normal goal is a larger 'secondary goal' which is much easier to score in. Scoring in the secondary goal is called scoring a 'point-behind', and awards a single point. Teams can push the puck through their own secondary goal, awarding the opposition a free point, in order to gain a 'hit out' from the goal area and possibly preventing the opposition team from a bigger score. This is very similar to a 'safety' in the ancient game of Gridiron.

The Unofficial Rules

Cheating is widely recognised as an important skill in the game, and it includes faking a fouled contact, holding down players after a collision or tackle, coaches bribing linesmen, sledging (insulting other players to throw them off their game), bringing concealed weapons onto the field, armouring the body underneath the uniform, arranging for spectators to attack other teams, etcetera.

The Golden Rule

Despite all the unnecessary roughness and outward brutality of the game the golden rule is this: No Killing.

Killers who escape official punishment find themselves the immediate target of reprisal attacks and in such cases "an eye for an eye" is considered fair play.

Some killers have even been attacked by their own team members in disapproval of such unsporting behaviour.

Bladehockey Home Teams

The Novacastria Knights

The Knights are the winners of last years Premiership, and would be a very hard team to join if a player was not already famous, or had a strong set of game stats. Opportunities might open up later in the year, as injuries take their toll, but the competition would still be strong.

The Knights use an inn called the Shaggy Dragon at Walls-End as their clubhouse, which suits their captain 'Chief' Hurricane, who is a LEO stationed at Walls-End. Adoring fans often surround them at the Dragon after practise, which some of the players enjoy and others find annoying, but the players are always polite to their supporters.

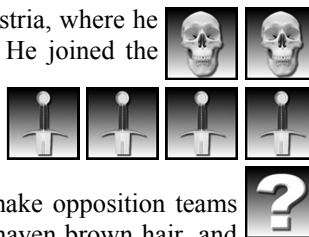
On the field they play a power game, that blitzes the opposition but leaves the Knights open to counter-attack, and Knights games usually finish with very close scores. In recent years the team has had more than its share of accusations of bribery and sledging, but they chalk this up to the opposition teams being poor losers, and nothing has ever been proven. If the Knights do employ professional cheaters in their team (see The Australian Bladehockey League) they are very careful about keeping their identities secret, and everyone on their official roster takes to the field at least once each match.

When the Knights travel to Sydney matches, Commander Bryan sends a detachment of LEOs to escort them, a favour he does not extend to the Steelheads team, probably because his best LEO officer does not play for the Steelheads.



'Chief' Hurricane, Captain

The 'Chief' is a local-boy-made-good, born and raised in Novacastria, where he began his career as a civic fire-fighter, thus earning his nickname. He joined the LEOs a few years later than most young recruits, and took up Bladehockey to quickly boost his close-combat skills and general fitness.



Standing nearly seven feet tall and being extremely muscular, the Chief is physically imposing, and his mere presence is enough to make opposition teams fall apart and criminals want to surrender peacefully. He has short shaven brown hair, and several scars that criss-cross his face, but otherwise he is a handsome man and the female supporters of the Knights always flock to him.

The 'Chief' knows that he may be a good leader, but that he is not a brilliant strategist. He refuses to be lured into political arguments, and always defers to the LEO policy of neutrality and bows out of discussions such as Alliance versus Centralists, the worship of Erebus, and is there any link between Daemonic and Gurri magic?

On the playing field he is less reserved, and barks orders at his players as if he was commanding a company of LEOs. Because of his reputation he unknowingly affects the calls of judges and linesmen during Bladehockey games, but he would be horrified if anyone accused him of cheating, and believes that fortune simply favours the bold.

The Steelheads

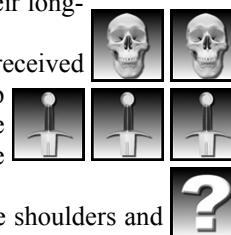
The Steelheads are the 'second team' in Novacastrian Bladehockey, and they continuously live in the shadow of the Knights, longing for the day when they will win the premiership. In a bitter irony the Steelheads are so inspired by their rivalry with the Knights that they often defeat them, but then go on to lose to other less talented teams.

Looking to distinguish themselves as a team in their own right, the Steelheads paid to have a clubhouse called The Smelter built in Civic, but the name has proven a turn-off to many punters, and the club is looking for new management to rectify their current financial problems. When they journey to Sydney to play, the team has to dip into its own coffers to hire guards and mercenaries. They are embittered by the fact that the LEOs provide a free escort for the Knights' matches, and fights between drunken Steelheads and the LEO patrols in Civic are not uncommon.

Mathias Jones, Goalie

Stressing the defensive nature of their game, the Steelheads appointed their long-time goalie as captain.

Like the 'Chief', Mathias Jones is a local Novacastrian, but he has never received the same popular support, and he tries not to let this upset him. As the top goalie in the Australian League, he is used to getting a better reception on the road than he does at home, which makes him relish each victory over the Knights all the more.



Jones is not a tall man, but he is very strong for his size and he has wide shoulders and big hands. Combined with a mutation that left him with enhanced reflexes this helps make him a great goalie.

As the captain of the team, Jones often approaches field umpires to get specific calls overturned, but his 'negotiating skills' are poor and he would be glad to meet someone who was willing to take over such duties.

Bladehockey Visiting Teams

North Sydney Sea Eagles

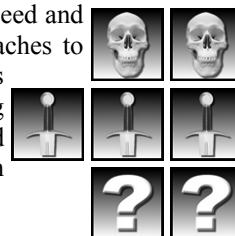
The Sea Eagles are a long established team that draws upon a heritage of several now extinct codes of sport, giving it an amazingly deep fan base that crosses all of Sydney.

The team prides itself on fast and flashy play, and will often claim 'moral victories' over teams such as the Steelheads who play very defensively. As far as club sizes go, the Sea Eagles are big business, which is reflected in their enormous clubhouse on one of the beaches of northern Sydney.

It has been several years since the Sea Eagles won the premiership, and they have struggled to find a good goalie.

Clifan Lions, Captain

Clifan is a short man, built low to the ground, but possessed of incredible speed and a tactical ability to put plays together that puts most other players and coaches to shame. He has been accused of being too 'soft' in tackles, but even if his opponent does not lose the puck, they always seem to have trouble disposing of it, let alone making a useful play. Clifan is an expert at sledging, and opposition players often lose their cool and draw professional fouls, which the captain is able to make them suffer for.



South Sydney Swans

The Swans are a team that was formed of athletes who had fled the Daemonic invasion and destruction of Melbourne (now Nathrad), and they have since had trouble gathering local support in Sydney, despite the fact that 'Big Bad' Ben Hall is one of the leading Strikers in the league.

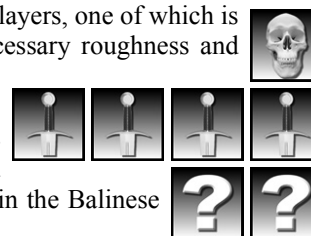
The Swans play a counter-attacking game, and specialise in controlling the midfield and forcing turn-arounds, and this style has brought them close to winning the premiership, and most punters speculate that this could be their year.

The Swans clubhouse, The Club, is located in the inner city of Sydney, and is surprisingly welcoming to visiting teams – the reason for this being that the management uses the opportunity to bond with and recruit good players from their opposition.

'Big Bad' Ben Hall, Striker

The on-field captaincy of the Swans is rotated throughout the top players, one of which is Striker Ben Hall, who has a reputation for getting away with unnecessary roughness and sledging his opponents until they lose their cool.

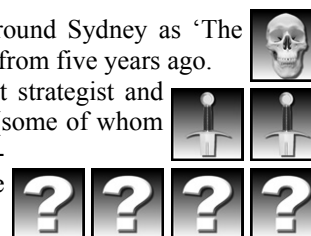
Typical of most Strikers, Hall is a strong man who knows how to use body positioning to clear out defenders. He accentuates his appearance by keeping his hair in a close shaven mohawk, and decorating his skin and almost-bald scalp with fierce looking tattoos in the Balinese style.



Roo Kelly, Coach

The second biggest asset to the Swans is their coach, known around Sydney as 'The Roo', who has planned the team's approach to this year's premiership from five years ago.

A dark, quiet, and normally reserved man, The Roo is an expert strategist and tactician, who can inspire true loyalty and sacrifice from his players (some of whom he played with before he became a coach). He is also a master of off-field strategy, who will hire spies, psychologists, diviners, and 'people able to get things done', to ensure a favourable outcome on the field.



Western Sydney Swoops

The Swoops are the latest team to join the national Bladehockey league, formed by a core of female athletes who felt they had been ostracised by other teams and not given a fair run. Although they have fielded male players in their roster, most men leave the team after only a season, moving to a highly paid contract elsewhere, which says good things about the quality of the Swoop's training, but not their people management.

The Swoops have a clubhouse in western Sydney called Panthers, which has a fast growing membership that targets younger punters. The clubhouse also functions as a de-facto stadium-arena, featuring musical acts and theatre, and the financial management of the club is very secure.

Lizbeth Elias, Captain

Lizbeth was kept on the bench by both the Swans and the Sea Eagles, before she joined forces with several other female players, secured a financial backer, and started her own club. She had to endure years where the Swoops were considered a 'joke team'; until they managed to knock the Knights off the minor-premiership several years back.

Lizbeth is tall for a woman, and more wiry than muscular, with a loud voice, and long strawberry-blonde hair that she ties up before each game. She bases her game on skill and group tactics. Although she lacks the creative flair of Clifan Lions from the Sea Eagles, she maintains a wide repertory of set plays that she can call on for most situations. She has proven a very quick learner of the 'art of sledging', and can infuriate or distract opponents with an embarrassing ease, although she thinks such tactics 'semi-professional' and will only use them as a last resort.



Bladehockey Visiting Teams

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

The Australian Bladehockey League

The Australian Bladehockey League is a five-team league that plays the Australian variant of Bladehockey.

Invitational matches are played with the Traitor Daemon 'Stormers' from Nathrad, usually for large purses, although the Traitor Daemons have been soured on the idea after losing the last game they played to the Novacastria Knights because of what was described as blatant cheating.

The Knights earned the right to play at Nathrad after winning the league premiership, and won a very close and brutal match against the Nathrad Stormers that included numerous dubious line calls and errors in refereeing. 'Chief' Hurricane bravely collected the winning trophy and lucrative prize money, in front of thousands of Daemon spectators who were baying for his blood, and many believe the team was lucky to make it out of Nathrad alive!

The Previous Season

At the end of last season the highest player stats were as shown in the tables below. Depending on how much interest is shown in the league by player characters, they could get involved anywhere from the start of the trials, to the final weeks of the premiership.

Even if they win the next premiership, the Knights are unlikely to be invited back to play at Nathrad in the near future. Should the Knights be knocked back punters expect a lot of last minute team changes and shuffling, as players vie for spots on whatever team they think will go to the invitational.

Last Years Leading Scorers

Rank	Name	Team	Pos	GP	G	S	PPG	SHG	GW	GT
1	'Chief' Hurricane	Novacastria Knights	S	52	61	176	32	7	13	0
2	Clifan Lions	North Sydney Sea Eagles	LW	59	41	328	17	12	5	1
3	Ben Hall	South Sydney Swans	S	41	33	150	17	1	11	0
4	Lizbeth Elias	Western Sydney Swoops	RW	32	34	193	6	7	4	1
5	Alison Kovaks	Novacastria Knights	RW	57	35	175	14	5	6	0
6	Petre Silvani	The Steelheads	LW	59	40	257	20	0	4	0
7	Joe Matera	Novacastria Knights	C	59	25	146	9	0	4	0
8	Shane Kingly	South Sydney Swans	LW	52	37	231	11	1	5	1
9	Hector Martan	The Steelheads	RW	62	30	264	12	4	6	0
10	Kelly Pale	Western Sydney Swoops	C	61	29	251	13	2	6	0
11	Adam Damgood	The Steelheads	LW	60	30	203	13	1	6	0
12	Hezrburg	North Sydney Sea Eagles	C	56	28	212	14	0	4	0

Pos – Position, GP – Games Played, G – Goals, S – Shots, PPG – Power Play Goals, SHG – Short Handed Goals, GW – Game Winning Goals, GT – Game Tying Goals

Last Years Leading Goalies

Rank	Name	Team	Pos	GP	GA	SO	W	L
1	Mathias Jones	The Steelheads	G	18	22	1	10	8
2	Dani Yari	Western Sydney Swoops	G	15	14	1	9	6
3	Howler Adams	South Sydney Swans	G	9	6	0	7	2
4	Kugurri	Novacastria Knights	G	14	29	0	11	3
5	Bill Butcha	North Sydney Sea Eagles	G	8	25	0	4	4
6	Tica Olsen	North Sydney Sea Eagles	G	4	6	0	2	2

Pos – Position, GP – Games Played, GA – Goals Against, SO – Shut Outs, W – Wins, L – Losses

Recruiting

Because of injuries, recruitment is an on-going process for any Bladehockey team, and few teams complete a season without serious roster changes. As a rule, the more successful teams will have few injuries and thus few spots for amateur players who want to try their luck.

Part of recruitment is salary negotiation, and while there is no salary cap imposed on teams, most clubs can't afford to pay outrageous player fees. Players who do get paid excessive amounts find themselves targets for 'unnecessary roughness' and being 'shut out' during a game, even from members of their own teams – because every coin they take is one coin less for everyone else.

No player can expect to be hired on reputation alone, and trials are held during practise sessions, and the first couple of games are always on a probation. It is during this time that new recruits can expect a certain amount of 'hazing' as a form of initiation. Although better players have to deal with less hazing, it is part of the team building experience and no one gets to totally avoid it.

Cheating!

Cheating, and not getting caught, is a grudgingly accepted part of Bladehockey in Australia, and if it makes the spectacle more amusing or more interesting for the punters, then the officials happily look the other way.

Some teams even have 'professional cheaters' on their teams. These are people who never actually take to the field, and most can't hit a puck to save their lives, but they are experts in all the right areas of cheating – bribery, spying, robbery, kidnapping, blackmail, and even the placing of curses and hexes on other players.

Roo Kelly, the coach for the Novacastria Knights, actually started his Bladehockey career this way with the Steelheads, before he learned so much about the Knights that the Knights' managers thought it would be best to simply appoint him as their coach.

Winning

Winning a game of Bladehockey opens the doors for players to move to better contracts and better teams. Winning the premiership opens up opportunities of being poached by overseas (or even otherworldly) teams.

Wealth and fame are the first fruits on offer, and after that a player can negotiate for whatever they want. Popular and influential players can expect to be courted by the minions of Erebus several times during their careers, with offers of Daemonic power in exchange for their soul, or just for playing in a Daemonic team. In the Daemon's minds, the highest privilege they can offer is to be allowed to play before Erebus himself.

Transitioning to a new playing style with its new challenges is not always successful, but for those who relish the change, the universe is their oyster...

Gladiators

Locals

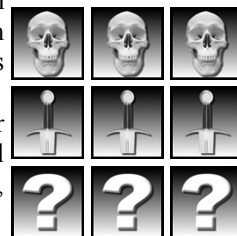
All local gladiators maintain the peace in public, and reserve their fighting for the Arena, where it can earn them money for their troubles. Although there are nearly a hundred fighters who use the Arena, most of them are generic fighter-types simply looking for quick money at other people's expense, with a few exceptions...

The Maitland Mauler

The 'Mauler' is an inglorious local fighter who was forced to resign from the LEOs after becoming mostly deaf and losing part of his long term memory, due to a Daemonic spell cast upon him in the line of duty. He was offered a pension, but chose to continue 'work' as a gladiator.

Markus 'The Mauler' is a thick set man, muscular, with short blond hair and thick eyebrows. He sweats as soon as he gets hot, which in summer is all the time, and often walks around in his armour with a mace under one arm, and a cool jug of wine in the other.

Unlike most other gladiators, the Mauler is actually very easy to talk to, although he shouts a lot. He will freely pass on his expertise and knowledge to newcomers to the Arena, and try and steer them away from making mistakes, such as signing on with the wrong promoter, if it can be avoided.



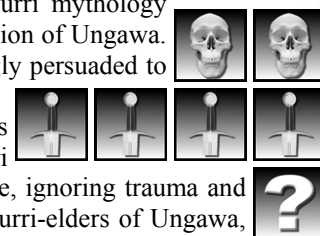
Tjabuinji

Named after one of the two mythical Lightning-Brothers of Gurri mythology 'Tja', as he is known to his friends, is both a gladiator and the champion of Ungawa. He only accepts duels against non-Gurri's, and even has to be strongly persuaded to fight non-Gurri if they are supporters of Ungawa.

Tja is tall, young, wiry, and almost skinny. In the Arena he wears no special armour, relying on his supernatural speed. Like many Gurri he has a very high pain threshold, and can withstand a lot of damage, ignoring trauma and system shock. He wields a steel-tipped spear given to him by the Gurri-elders of Ungawa, and a necklace of the bones of vanquished foes, that supposedly protects him. The necklace has never registered or been detected as a magic item, although Tja categorically insists that it is.

Despite his traditionalist background, Tja never puts on face or body paint for Arena fights, reserving such adornment for Gurri ceremonies. He wears and fights in normal trousers and shirts, removing the shirt just before fighting, and putting it on straight away afterwards. He prefers to wear original 'sandshoes' if he can find them or buy them, but otherwise walks barefoot on even the most jagged and harsh terrain.

Although a skilled warrior, Tja is a comparative novice to the secrets of Ungawa, and he sometimes feels that the elders are holding him back. Because of this he is likely to join up with explorers and adventurers, and 'go walkabout' for months on end, with no thought of fulfilling his Arena contracts.



'Nobbie'

The so-called gladiator known as Nobbie is the most unusual creature that can ever be seen fighting in an Arena anywhere. Nobbie is a towering Morton-Bay Fig Tree, that has become the residence of a powerful Gurri tree-spirit.

The tree's activities were first observed in Civic, after a group of LEOs followed a trail of smashed power poles that led to where the tree was rooted in a park outside the Council chambers. Over time people noticed that the tree moved position slightly, and eventually someone became curious enough to watch the tree all night – and they saw it get up and walk away!

The Council ordered the tree destroyed as a public menace, but Tjabuinji, the spokesman for Ungawa, persuaded the Council to let the tree spirit live, as long as it was safely 'potted' and secured in the Stadium.

Local punters were amused to find a chained and potted tree in the middle of the Stadium, but were amazed when they saw the tree come alive and smash several visiting gladiators to pieces, soaking their spilt blood from the sand by extending its roots.

As Tjabuinji had guessed, the tree spirit was a guardian of some kind, and it was simply lashing out at what it perceived as a threat. Gurri elders communed with the tree and learnt that it had come to the city for a reason, but it would not say what the reason was. They kept this knowledge secret within Ungawa, and simply told the Council that the tree spirit enjoyed fighting in the Arena and that it should stay there.

As a joke punters began to bet on the tree – and then it started winning. People named the tree 'Nobbie', in honour of the lighthouse that stands on the harbour headland, and Nobbie proved so ferocious that the great tree's pot had to be dragged aside to allow others to fight in safety.

Nobbie is both powerful in Gurri magic, and incredibly strong of trunk and limb. As a spirit, Nobbie is impervious to mental attacks and domination, much like a Daemon. The tree's physical form is not immune to fire, but the spirit is able to change and control fire through magic.

Of great interest is the fact that the tree spirit has refused to fight J'Bai, the Traitor Daemon and leading gladiator, suffering several deep gouges into it's trunk without offering any resistance or striking back. Rumour has it that the tree can tell the difference between those who serve Erebos, and those who follow D'kara.

Visiting Gladiators

J'Bai, Traitor Demon from Nathrad

Originally a lieutenant in the service of D'Kara, J'Bai has fought against the forces of Erebos innumerable times, and considers the Arena to simply be his personal training tool. He has not yet met defeat in the Arena, and has a reputation for not considering the lives of his opponents, or offering them mercy if they wish to surrender.

J'Bai fights without armour in the Arena, wielding a normal bastard sword, but outside the Arena he wears Daemonic Armour and wields a Daemon Blade. The easiest way for humans to distinguish J'Bai from other Traitor Demons is by a thick white scar that runs between his eyes. Rumour has it that J'Bai gained the wound when a Dancer of Death stabbed him – he apparently 'caught the blade with his head' and strangled the Dancer while it held onto the hilt. The validity of the story is hard to prove, since J'Bai rarely talks with anyone, even other members of the Sons of the Rebellion.

J'Bai was originally sent to Novacastria by D'Kara, to root out any Daemon activity, but the blow that caused his prominent scar has left him listless and unmotivated most of the time. He will be quick to anger if shown proof of Daemonic activity in Novacastria, but unless shown such proof he will be slow to find it himself, and dismissive of rumours and misdirection.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Gladiators

Temura Smyte

Temura hails from the Moriori Kingdom which claims most of the Southern Pacific Ocean west of Australia. He came to Australia to face the best gladiators he could, and to date he has faced everyone in Novacastria except 'Nobbie' and Tjabuinji. He lost his duel with J'Bai, but proved strong enough to recover from his wounds, and would accept a return-match if he thought it would prove anything.

As an outsider to the city he cares nothing for local politics, and rumours in Mayfield say that he can be hired as an assassin, although there is no one (alive) who can confirm this. Because of his deadly reputation most people avoid him if they can, and he appears to prefer things that way.

Temura is of average height, highly muscular, and capable of extreme feats of strength. His tattooed dark Moriori skin is unnaturally tough, and provides protection equivalent to light armour. He has short black hair constantly kept in a crew cut, dark eyes, and the warlike facial tattoos common to Moriori warriors.

The truth behind Temura's arrival in Novacastria is that he has been sent by an ancient Moriori seer, who has sensed the growth of a Daemonic power in the Hunter Valley. Temura believes that the evil he has been sent to destroy lurks somewhere in the old steelmills, but what he does not know is that the force he seeks is actually the Temple of Erebus. Temura will volunteer without explanation to join any expedition organised to go into the steelmills, but when the dust has settled he will become incredibly frustrated when he realises that he has not completed his mission (assuming he survives). Those who sent him on his mission have given him powerful healing magic, some of which he was forced to use to recover from the wounds J'Bai gave him.



MEET THE LOCALS

Ancients

The Hidden Fire

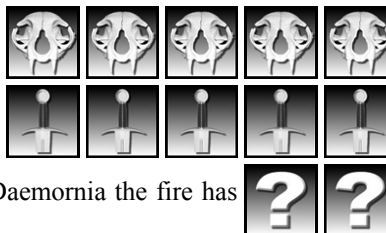
In ancient times, before humans walked the land, a powerful evil spirit was chased underground somewhere near the lighthouse at the entrance to Novacastria harbour. What the evil spirit was fleeing from is not clear, but to defend itself it set fire to a coal seam that ran under earth.

Ever since that day the earth smouldered, which was recorded in Colonial and Modern history, although since the Daemornia the fire has gone out.

Gurri elders suspect that the evil spirit there is asleep or in hibernation. The old Newcastle (Novacastria) council sealed off the entrance to the seam a hundred years before the Daemons came, but Ungawa still reminds young Gurri not to venture near the place – suspecting that Gurri magic may trigger the spirit's awakening.

The evil that sleeps quietly beneath the lighthouse is the disembodied spirit of a Druge (Dragon) that came into the world at its creation, and if awakened it would fly out into the world once more, unable to directly effect anyone or anything but acting as a powerful 'beacon' for Daemons all over the planet. The forces of Erebos would be extremely interested in the spirit, and Daemons would be sent to try to claim it. The chaos and destruction caused by this event would set Novacastria back more than a decade in terms of reconstruction, and claim thousands of lives.

The likelihood of anyone strong in Gurri magic digging their way towards the buried spirit, and not being warned away or openly stopped by the elders of Ungawa, is extremely low, but it would cause a major game-changing event.

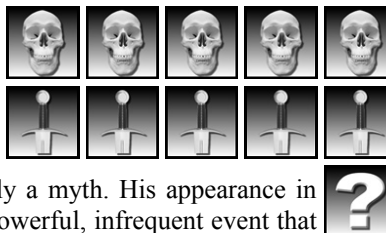


The 'Hunter'

An ancient Gurri legend relates of how an avatar of Biame, the creator, was sent into the world to destroy the chaos that survived the earth's creation. The spirit roamed across the continent, driving evil underground so that mankind could live in peace, until magic began to leave the world.

Now that magic has returned the Hunter is stirring once more, although most Gurri elders consider that he was actually a myth. His appearance in mythology is similar to the 'Wild Hunt' of Celtic lore; it is a powerful, infrequent event that can be summoned in the case of a dire emergency by those who know how

At present the only mortals with the ability, if not the exact knowledge of how to summon the Hunter, are Truginji and Meilini the Gurri sorceresses in Muswelbrook. How the Hunter would react to the non-Gurri races (Humans, Reptilians, Draga, Traitor Daemons, etc.) is also a question that has never been answered, and the politics surrounding this point could cause great turmoil in the city and valley.



MEET THE LOCALS

Ancients

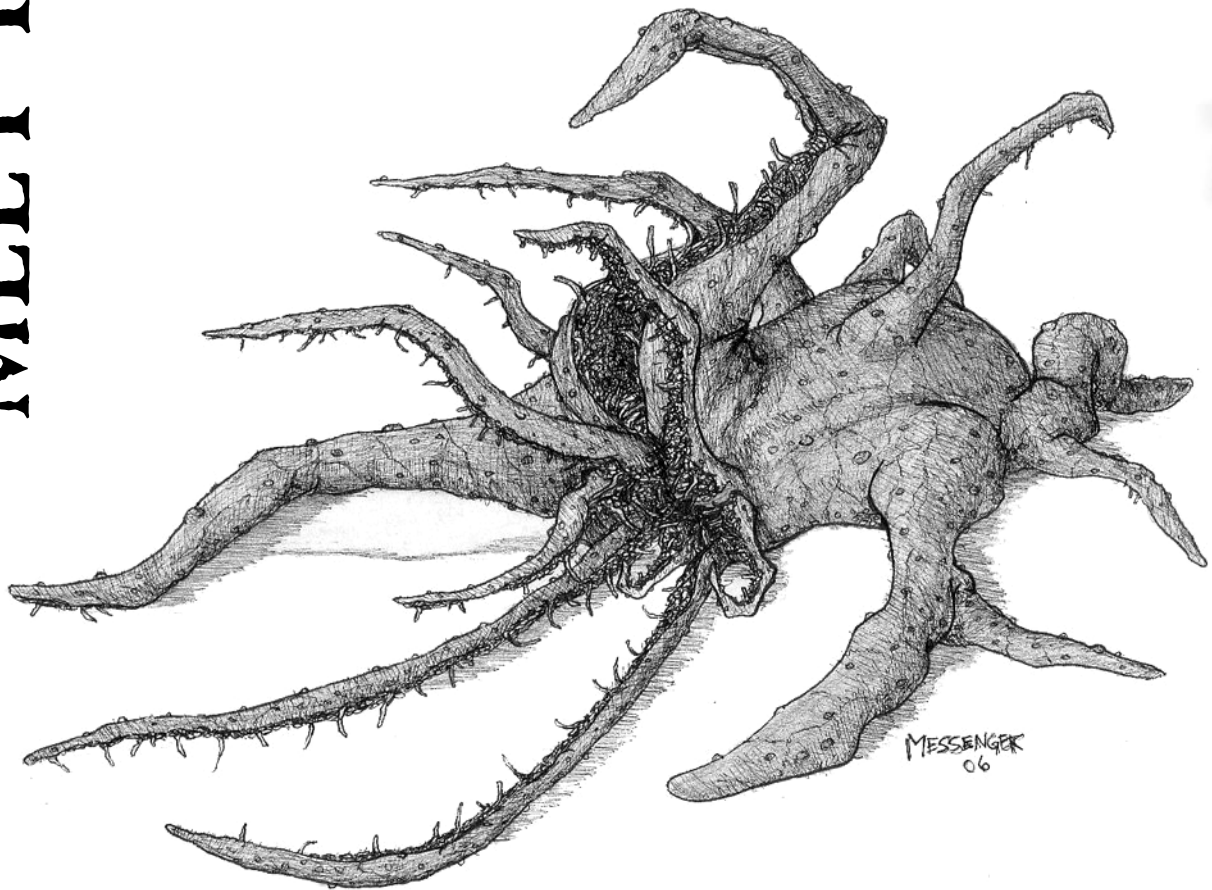
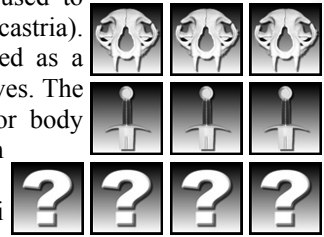
Things from the Quarry

Outside the Hunters Gate at Walls-End, are the quarries that used to provide the raw materials for construction all over Newcastle (Novacastria). When the Daemons of Erebos first invaded, the quarries were used as a dumping ground for the bodies of slain humans, and otherworldly slaves. The place crawled with feeding Rogrots, and Necromancers looking for body parts. The remains have turned to dust now, but a great evil was born from that unholy time that still remains.

The 'Things' are chaotic monstrosities, drawn from the Gurri dreamtime by the calls of the dying as they lay in the charnel pits waiting for their misery to end. The Daemons were unconcerned by the Things, and likewise the Things did not care for the Daemons, and neither interfered in the affairs of the other. In fact, when the allied races came to liberate the city, the evil Gurri spirits hid, and gave the Daemons no aid.

The appearance of a Thing is that of a sickly grey rolling mass, that can extend pseudo-pods to draw itself along the ground and grab at prey. Things are very intelligent monsters, and will lure victims deep into the quarry, underground if possible, before attacking them in a swarm.

For each Thing slain, the spirits of several hundred victims of the charnel pits will be released. A shaman, or a psyker, could commune with the released spirits in the instant before they cross over, and gain a picture of what the Hunter Valley looked like before the Daemornia. The spirits might also be able to provide important information that has long disappeared from the world.



Newcomers

The People beyond the Wall



MEET THE LOCALS

Newcomers

Although not an acute threat, the People beyond the Wall (see Walls-End) are a constant menace because they attack the Wall without any apparent motive other than wanton destruction, and their numbers appear inexhaustible.

Several expeditions have set out in search of their origin, but none have returned. Because the road to Sydney does not get attacked by the creatures, the Council is reluctant to spend too much effort on solving the problem, when the LEOs are quite capable of hacking them apart each day.

THE TRUTH

The truth about the 'People beyond the Wall' is more alarming and incredible than even the speculation.

Once human, the 'People' were infected during the incursion with a strain of the Great Plague that had mutated, and everyone it killed rose up the next day as an intelligent undead-like creature. The virus gave them superhuman strength, the ability to ignore pain, and they had little need to eat or drink. Their skin took on a pale chalky colour, and their bodies refused to heal any damage, but otherwise their physical appearance was little changed from that of a human. In fact the People continued to build and inhabit human-like settlements, which they concealed from the still-living. With their slow metabolism the People became nocturnal, because they derived a large amount of their body's energy from resting in the sun, and during daytime they would lie around looking for all the world like a pile of fresh corpses.

MEET THE LOCALS

Newcomers

Many theologians and scientists have argued for the existence of a soul and its importance to the body, but none has ever before conceived of a disease that actually killed the soul – which is what has happened to the People. Once ‘infected’, the mutant Plague virus corrupts and kills the soul, as well as the mind, replacing it with an evil intent and intelligence that seeks to perpetuate itself.

The most horrifying aspect of all this is the same question that vexes Novacastria researchers – if the People are not living, and actually decaying, why are there so many of them, and how are they made?

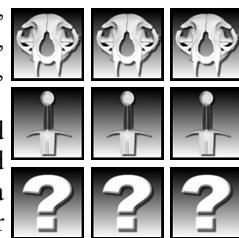
The truth is that when they breed, the People actually give birth to living Human babies! They are raised for a number of years and, until they turn seven years old, the children act as daytime watchers for their ‘parents’. By the time the children have grown up they are brutalised and inhuman, fiercely savage and anti-social. The People deceive them that their parents are normal, and that the rest of the world is out to harm them.

When they are due to be ‘turned’ they are taken away by their parents and infected in a gory ritual that is designed to terrify the last of their humanity out of them. What emerges from the shattered life of the child is one of the People.

Although none have lived to tell the tale, explorers who have found the People’s settlements during the day encountered streets littered with ‘corpses’, and feral children flitting around the shadows and throwing rocks at them. Because the People sometimes steal babies from the living, and raise them as their own before infecting them, it is possible that some of the children might have considered escaping with the explorers, but there is no way to determine this now.

The reason for the People’s daylight attacks on the Wall is that eventually their bodies accumulate so much un-repairable damage that they can no longer properly function, and the rest of the People exile them in the direction of Novacastria. With nothing else left, all they can do is to expend their remaining un-life attacking the living, knowing that it will bring a quick and merciful release from their existence, and hopefully that they will claim a few new infectees with their hatred.

At present the People are leaderless, not inclined to follow others, and only a vague threat to Novacastria. They could be coordinated, but it would require an extremely powerful outsider to do so, probably a Daemon or a magic-user, and they would have to be assured of tangible gains for their efforts.



The Spawn of Samael

Although the ghastly sea-Daemon that attacked the harbour over a decade ago was killed by Councillor Margrave captaining the HMAS Oberon, the creature had already mated with another of its kind and laid its eggs inside the hold of the wreck of the Sigma (see, Outside the City).

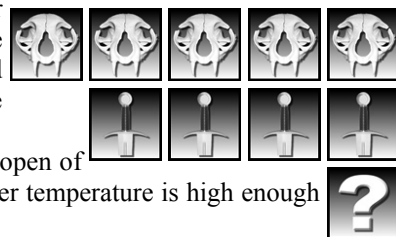
The eggs are ready to hatch – if left undisturbed they will open of their own accord in two or three more summers, when the water temperature is high enough to catalyse the process.

However, if disturbed by a warm blooded creature, such as a human being, the eggs will begin to hatch immediately.

There are over a dozen eggs, hidden throughout the wreck of the old ship, and it is possible that not all of them will hatch at the same time. Should a sea-Daemon reach the open water, it will be able to slip out of reach of all but the most powerful magic.

The young sea-Daemons inside the eggs measure nine feet in length, and grow at a rate of about ten feet per year, until reaching their full size of two-hundred feet. If this is allowed to happen, fishermen in the area will notice a steady, and then rapid decline in the amount of fish in their catches, and small boats will go missing from time to time.

The sea-Daemons may try to invade the Hunter river system, if not stopped by the LEOs at Sandgate or Hexham. They will leave the river before they get too big, but not before severely disrupting riverboat traffic and killing many people. This could be the trigger that Captain Lewis of Singleton needs to invade the city and stage his coup.



A WORLD OF PROGRESS

As you read through this book you may notice that almost every single character, place, or event has a plot hook in its description. This section is not meant to replace those ideas, but to string them together in a consistent manner that can be used to generate your own adventures.

In order to fill out the details in this section, the GM may be required to create location maps, or use stock maps. Character stats will also need to be worked out at least in simplified form, and they should be relative to the strength of the encounter and to the abilities of the players. The stock NPC descriptions from the core rulebook come in very handy for this, and they may be all you need. After all, the memorable differences in NPCs is not their stats, it is their motivations, personalities, behaviours, and attitudes towards the players.

Rebuilding the City

Although plagued by Daemons, a lot of the city's infrastructure remains in place and workable – sewage lines, water pipes, electricity and telecommunication lines, even a short train line in and out of the old steelmills. Without any improvements Novacastria will remain an important regional centre for a long time, but if upgraded it could become a fully fledged tech-city.

Harnessing the Windmill

It is theoretically possible to repair the windmill on Kooragang Island, which can provide a source of non fossil-fuel based electricity for a multiplicity of purposes.

The windmill needs new propellers, but most of all it needs the Nominods that live there to be eradicated, and a solution found for the plague-infested birds that nest on the island. Power lines back to the city still exist, and only need to be wired up once again.

Both Centralists and the Alliance support restoring the windmill, as does the Dark Circle – who have their own diabolical plan for it. The windmill is central to Councillor Helena's plan to restore the Adamstone transmitter, and if she feels that the Council isn't giving the project the resources it deserves she will dip into her own coffers to hire extra help.

Restoring the Transmitter

Currently used as a signal tower and fighting platform, the transmitter at Adamstone has most of its electronics intact, and if power was restored it could be made to function again.

The antennae on the tower are useable, but are un-powered like the rest of the site, and to make them operational would require the Kooragang Island windmill to be rebuilt. Restoring a radio or two-way communications system to the tower is a plan of both the Centralists and the Alliance, although they plan to use such a resource in different ways.

Councillor Helena (see Civic) has been trialling spell projection at the University, and has an ambitious plan to use the transmitter to literally cast a spell of 'Daemon warding' over everything in its broadcast range, which includes all the townships in the Hunter valley. This is a grand plan with no guarantee of success, probably requiring hard to get spell components, but an idea that Helena feels is worth pursuing. As a leading magic-researcher in the world, if anyone can make it work she can.

Meanwhile, the Dark Circle has developed two different plans for the tower. The first involves faking a Daemon attack that would cause the LEOs to allow people to take shelter in the bunker. Once inside, Dark Fanatics and Daemonettes would begin sabotaging the equipment and picking off the LEOs. This plan has never gone ahead because of a rival plan in the Dark Circle to use a working transmitter to spread an electronic version of the Great Plague to anyone who will listen.

The relevant rivals in the Dark Circle are currently plotting against each other, and each is eager to recruit malcontents to do their dirty work and slay the other faction.

Clearing the Steelmills

The most likely project that the city will authorise is the exploration and re-activation of the steelmills (see Abandoned Steelmills). With a working steelmills all other projects become a good possibility – such as the construction of an exploration ship, and the smithing of mass-produced weapons, armour, tools, and goods.

Initial forays into the steelmills will prove highly successful, because the Minoan-Daemonette that dwells there will retreat until the intruders become complacent. The only resistance will come from Rogrots, Nominods, and one or two Dancers of Death that refuse to be pushed out. The Children of Erebos will try to hinder the operation, but cannot do much against a sustained effort from the LEOs. Akayli, leader of the Children, will visit Councillor Redweigh and try and convince him of the danger of enraging the powerful Daemon she saw – unknowing that she is talking directly to the head of the Dark Circle.

Once the furnaces are re-lit and production commences, the LEOs will drop their guard and the Barrier around Mayfield will stay open. On the next moonless night the entire shift of steelworkers will vanish without a trace – as the Minoan-Daemonette picks them off methodically and tosses them into the furnaces with its horns.

The LEOs will go on the offensive again, but the Daemon will hide once more,. It can only be located by someone who has an understanding of what it is, due to their understanding of how it was created, such as Professor Heinlem at the University, or whoever can solve the riddle of the Borlin at the Temple of Erebos. If the monster's lair is uncovered it will make a ferocious stand, before trying to escape into the swamp to the north, and hence into the Hunter Valley, where it may be a menace for centuries to come.

Election Fever!

Once every four years a general election of all the Council positions is held, and an election is due to occur soon. A whole election is a long process, with months of political dealing, negotiations, threats, and intimidation, before any voting takes place.

All the current Councillors will run for re-election, unless a candidate can persuade Councillor Chang to back them, and Colonel Lewis from Singleton and Akayli from Mayfield will also run.

Alliance supporters will do everything they can to ferry voters in from the townships, while the Centralists will try and block such moves. Colonel Lewis will go so far as to use the Crushers to ambush convoys of voters, and the violence will escalate as the townships act to defend themselves.

The Dark Circle will attack outlying towns and homes while people are away voting in the city, and kidnappings by Fanatics will escalate dramatically. Singleton will be as affected by this Daemonic violence as much as any other town, falsely allaying fears that Colonel Lewis has any support from the followers of Erebos.

If the status quo is upheld all the Councillors will be returned, although Dr Chang's seat may be filled by someone else, and Akayli may replace Councillor Smeat. Other outcomes are possible, but without a long standing support base in the city or the valley, winning a seat is next to impossible.

If Colonel Lewis is able to win a seat his plans for a coup de etat will be put on hold, until he realises that the Council will not bow to his every whim. If he fails to win a seat then his planned coup will be brought ahead of schedule, and Daemonic sightings and activity in the city will increase, as the Dark Circle does what it can to ensure that the Colonel's forces are called upon for support. If no other plan presents itself a wave of Fire Merces will be summoned and let loose upon the city, which could be devastating in the heat of summer.

Forging the Hunter Valley Alliance

The adventure hooks in this section all relate to strengthening the ties of the townships and people who support the Hunter Valley Alliance, which does not necessarily put them at odds with the Centralist faction, but it may well aggravate the tension between the two groups.

Peace in Forster-Tuncurry

Because of a dispute over who can collect taxes from the bridge they share, the twin towns of Forster-Tuncurry are in a state of siege against each other.

The current mayor of Tuncurry is a local Gurri leader called Bunji, who has managed to obtain confessions from council officials who used to work in Forster that they rigged the last election, and that he should have won it fair and square, even if only by a narrow margin.

The former mayor of Forster has passed on since the election due to ill health, and his successor feels that he has earned the right to the bridge tax through natural political succession.

The Centralists know that this dispute can be suppressed by the use of force, and they have made contact with Colonel Lewis in Singleton and suggested that he establish marshal law in the towns. The Colonel views this as a good test of his plans for a coup, and will ride into town with a band of Crushers, and impose law and order at gunpoint.

When it becomes apparent that the Colonel has no intention of relinquishing control of the towns, and is planning to stage rigged elections to appoint one of his own Crushers as the new mayor, supporters of the Alliance will have to judge how best to handle the situation.

Treaty with the Survivalists

The Survivalists in Barrington Tops are potential allies of the Alliance, and they are also one of the groups most likely to be able to accomplish any mission that requires stealth – from reconnaissance of the steelmills, to uncovering the location of the Temple of Erebos.

Because the Survivalists primarily want to be left alone, they will be difficult to treat with. Among the few things they might negotiate for are magical items, removal of Daemons that could be plaguing them, or a constant tithe of food from Stroud and Thunderbolts Way.

If they do agree to help a particular faction, the Survivalists will insist on that faction providing ‘contacts’ that can be their liaisons. The contacts will be expected to travel to Barrington Tops regularly, and provide strategic leadership and tactical advice on any missions the faction wants performed.

While obtaining the help of the Survivalists may seem like a great idea, and it can be, if the Survivalists suffer bad losses during a mission their innate paranoia will come to the fore, and they will believe that their allies consider them expendable. If this happens they will chase their contacts out of the Barrington Tops, and pursue them back to Stroud, making it very clear that they will be killed if they ever venture into their domain again.

FORGING THE HUNTER VALLEY ALLIANCE
A WORLD OF PROGRESS

Uncovering the Temple of Erebos

Although players should begin in Novacastria not knowing anything about the existence of a temple, chances are that they will eventually find out. They may be informed of Apoidae's suspicions, or get Temura Smyte to talk about his real reasons for coming to the city, and if nothing else happens the fact that there is a temple will become obvious by the increase in Daemonic activity throughout the valley; sacrifices, kidnappings, Daemon possession, wandering undead, screams and unholy noises in the night, etc.

Uncovering the temple may provide clues as to what is in the abandoned steelmills, or the temple may not be found until after the Council sends the LEOs and clearing crews in.

If Colonel Lewis launches his coup de' etat in Novacastria, the Dark Circle will be extremely active in kidnapping opponents of both themselves and the Centralists. The players may be able to follow clues back to Councillor Redweigh, or perhaps one of the kidnap victims will manage to escape, and will seek help through covert channels (such as Lewis Drum, in Stroud).

The possibilities for using the temple in your games are enormous, and range from it being a center for espionage and deceit, to the focus of a military style siege and dungeon bash!

Rousing the Hunter

If the **** really hits the fan in Novacastria – the Spawn of Samael are loosed, the Temple executes its Plague plans, the Druge is awakened, or the Minoan-Daemonette in the steelmills goes on the rampage – the only hope of rescue might be to summon the ancient Gurri spirit of 'the Hunter'.

The knowledge to call the Hunter would have to come from a supernatural source – a Gurri spirit, such as Biame or Tiddalik, or a seer such as the one Temura Smyte is on a mission for.

Only the most powerful magic users, psykers, or Gurri shaman would have a chance of awakening the Hunter, and because it is an unintelligent force they would have to give it explicit instructions to perform.

An example of one way to awaken the Hunter would be to recover a powerful Gurri artefact, probably from deep in the desert, and bring it to a symbolic location, such as the Black Cave. A fetish from each of the enemies to be battled would have to be obtained (how do you ask a Dragon to give you a scale?) and perhaps the Hunter would not be strong enough to do everything that was asked of it, or the players may be unable to keep up the summoning for long enough.

The Hunter presents an apocalyptic finale to many of the sub-plots and adventure hooks in Novacastria, after which it may be time to leave the city...

Building the 'Tasman Explorer'

Councillor Margrave has an ambitious plan to build the world's largest exploration vessel, to boldly sail the South Pacific, meet new and ancient civilisations, and unite them in the fight to restore humanity's claim on the planet and push back the forces of Erebos, hopefully closing the gate to Underworld.

Novacastria is the only place in Australia with a shipyard big enough to fulfil his dream, and there are plenty of raw components around, but some speciality items still need to be located.

Restarting the Furnaces

The Tasman Explorer will be primarily wood, but the hull will need to be shod in metal if it is to be strong enough to survive the jaws of the largest sea monsters. The amount and size of metal involved will require the use of a furnace, and thus at least part of the steelmills will have to be reclaimed and manned long enough to produce the required metal. This may be part of the Councils plans for the steelmills, or it may be a side project in the interim.

Locating the Masts

The best masts come from the Huon valley in Tasmania, but unless the players want to go on a long and dangerous sea crossing they will have to get masts closer to home.

The ancient pine trees in the Wollombi Valley, west of Stroud, are an excellent choice for masts, although not as tall as Huon Pines.

Harvesting three masts (and two spares if possible) might involve negotiating with the Gurri tree spirits that undoubtedly inhabit them, then dragging the masts by teams of bullocks, horses, or even Korg, as far as the Hunter River where they can be floated to Novacastria.

An interesting twist could be for the trees/masts to be magically preserved (or transplanted), allowing the Gurri spirits to remain in the masts while the ship sails around the world!

Obtaining Ballista and Cannons

Cannons may be obtained from a wide range of sources – they are sturdy items not easily destroyed, and there is even a working cannon on the HMAS Oberon. The problem is finding enough gunpowder to fire a cannon, and emptying single bullet cartridges into a cannon shell is wasteful. Perhaps the cannons could be modified as spell foci, or changed to fire sprung-loaded or steam-powered projectiles?

Ballista are much easier to procure, but like the masts the best local timber comes from the Wollombi Valley, far to the west.

If the Spawn of Samael are unleashed, or grow to maturity, the Tasman Explorer's first duty may be to defeat them, so ignoring the need for heavy weapons is a dangerous oversight.

Recovering old Charts

Once it is built the Tasman Explorer has to know where it is going and how to get there. The best sources of old charts are naval installations (the bases in Sydney were razed, but there are many others), as well as volunteer coast guard stations that have been deserted.

The houseboats in the Troglodyte infested Bulahdelah Lakes have a good set of Australian coastal maps (aka 'Oz-Charts'), and if all else fails a trip to the now Daemon infested libraries in the nation's former capital of Canberra may be required.

In terms of outsider help, the Moriori Kingdom is also a good place to search for maps, and they will certainly have maps and local guides, although the Moriori King might consider the Explorer a fine addition to his personal armada and try and claim it! (There are no free lunches in Daemornia.)

A WORLD OF PROGRESS
Building the 'Tasman Explorer'

The Circle of Erebos

Player characters may not always be as pure as the driven snow, but it is unlikely that on anything more than a philosophical level they will be supporters of Erebos.

However, in the unlikely event that they are, these plot hooks may prove interesting. Even if they not, these hooks should provide the GM with ideas about what the Dark Circle is planning.

Building the Temple

The Temple is designed to be a work that lasts until the 'days of his coming', and maintaining its secrecy is paramount – so much so that knowing the temple's location is a real bargaining chip amongst Fanatics, and something they try and weasel out of each other at any opportunity. In the most extreme case, the GM can assume that Councillor Redweigh is the only person who knows where the Temple is, or maybe he is the only one who can be negotiated with.

The downside of knowing the Temple's location is that the Fanatic then becomes partly responsible for ensuring its safety and secrecy, which can involve a wide range of missions – assassinations, ambushes, theft, and misdirection and planting false evidence.

The actual construction of the Temple is partly time dependent upon the size of the tree that acts as the gateway – but other than that it is simply extended by disintegrating sections of earth under the ground and reinforcing the hollowed areas.

Supporters of Erebos who want to perform their own experiments will definitely need the sanctity of the Temple if they want to avoid being lynched by angry citizens.

Subversion in the City

The Dark Circle is successful because it relies on subterfuge. Acts of subversion can range from bribing LEOs and Councillors, to rigging elections, cursing public places, and kidnapping citizens who speak against Erebos.

Establishing agents within the Council and the LEOs, as well as the university and the hospital, is very important to the Dark Circle – they provide all the clues the Circle needs to know who is doing what in the city, and how the knowledge can be used against them.

Conflicts between the main factions in the city (Centralists v. Alliance, and Ungawa v. Purity) are easy to arrange, although Fanatics must be extra careful to cover their tracks. Uniting the different factions in opposition to Erebos is a potential risk that has to be avoided at all costs!

Corrupting the Towns

The towns need to be infiltrated in exactly the same way that the city needs to be seduced – although this is a much more difficult proposition in country towns, where everyone knows what their neighbour is doing and they look out for each other. The influence of Erebos in the valley is much reduced, compared to what it is in the city, except in the case of unwilling pawns such as Colonel Lewis.

The destruction of Gurri guardians and spirits is important to the Dark Circle, despite any advice from Erebos as to where the Gurri fit in with the Daemons (or don't fit in). The decrease in mutants born at the Broken O Ranch in Muswelbrook will be of concern to the Dark Circle, although such news may take a while to filter to the city.

Breeding New Evils

‘Breeding evil’ is what Daemons are all about! Fanatics may learn what lurks in the abandoned steelmills, and how it was made, and try to recreate the experiment, or improve upon it.

If the riddle of the Borlin in the Temple is solved by a Fanatic, they may be entrusted with a quest to locate the instructions required to breed such a creature. While it is not necessary to go into details, the nature of the quest and the tasks required to make a Minoan-Daemonette would be suitably ‘evil’, with a capital E.

The Things that lurk in the quarry outside Walls-End can also provide a source of inspiration for Fanatics to cause problems with, although the Things are Gurri creatures and will attack Daemons as readily as humans.

Should the Spawn of Samael be uncovered, the city Council will take immediate steps to have them caged in and destroyed – and releasing the beasts would be high on a Fanatics ‘do to list’, although they should not expect the monsters to be grateful.

A WORLD OF PROGRESS

The Circle of Erebos

“Thank You”

Thank you for reading this book. I hope it provides you with the inspiration to run a Daemornia campaign in Novacastria, or elsewhere in Australia, and of course you could change the name and location to any other city that suits you! If you have any feedback, please email the author and he will try to respond.

Keep an eye out for future Daemornia releases, and other Better Mousetrap Games!

Patrick Taylor

A Little Something Extra! 'Speaking the Lingo'

Lingo (ling-go)
Lingo - coll. English (Australia) Language

Strine – 'the language of deception'

The dominate language of Australia is English, and the dialect spoken is a local one, called 'Strine'. It is a highly malleable way of speaking, able to assimilate most other forms of English. Amongst the Asian languages that have immigrated to the country it has been the Malay and Vietnamese languages that have been the quickest to absorb the unique pronunciations of Stine, followed by Chinese, and lastly by Japanese, which absorbs Strine very poorly. The reason for certain languages being better adapted to Strine are probably due to the degree of nasal intonations they use – a strong feature of the former languages, and a weaker feature of the later.

The following humorous observations on Strine have been re-printed from elsewhere...

'The American strain of the English language is simple and easily understood by most English speakers the world over. Its simplicity can be traced to the country's puritan foundations. As religious fanatics wanting to expand their flock, puritans desired a language of persuasion. To ensure clarity, they used generic words that were understood by the majority of the population. To increase the persuasive power of their words, they used a lot of analogies.

Contrasted to America, the foundations of Australian English were in the prison system. Unlike puritans, convicts did not want a simple language to persuade others to unite behind them. To the contrary, convicts wanted to disguise their language so that no one would know what they were talking about.

As a legacy, the contemporary Australian dialect, or Strine, is littered with idioms, similes and invented words that make it one of the world's most advanced English dialects. Although speakers of American English struggle to understand English speakers from outside of America, speakers of Strine can understand everyone, or confuse everyone if they so desire.

...
Strine's use of slang also reinforces Australia's egalitarian values. Slang is used to show that the speaker belongs to the same group as the listener. By constantly developing slang, Australians are constantly breaking down psychological barriers of formality and social distance. Unlike Australia, most other English speaking countries fear intruding on someone's "space". Instead of using slang, they use very formal English to maintain social distance. When they encounter an Australian using slang, they often feel the Australian is being arrogant or rude.

The business letter format is a simple example of how Australian slang has reinforced the egalitarian psychology of Australians. Americans and English people begin letters with Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs/Lord/Your Highness... Australians usually begin business letters with Dear (First name).'

Few speakers of Strine portray the use of the language as well as the former Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Below are excerpts from speeches he gave in Parliament, taken from the official record:

Prime Minister Keating on Former Leader of the Opposition, John Hewson:

"(His performance) is like being flogged with a warm lettuce leaf."

"I have a psychological hold over Hewson...He's like a stone statue in the cemetery."

On Former Leader of the Opposition, Andrew Peacock

"I suppose that the Honourable Gentleman's hair, like his intellect, will recede into the darkness."

"I was nearly chloroformed by the performance of the Honourable Member for Mackellar. It nearly put me right out for the afternoon."

On John Howard, then member of the opposition, now Prime Minister

"What we have got is a dead carcass, swinging in the breeze, but nobody will cut it down to replace him."

"I am not like the Leader of the Opposition. I did not slither out of the Cabinet room like a mangy maggot..."

On Independent, Steele Hall:

"The Honourable Member has been in so many parties he is a complete political harlot."

On the press

*"You (press member) had an important place in Australian society on the National Broadcaster and you gave it up to be a pop star...with a big cheque...and now you're on to this sort of stuff. That shows what a 24 carat ***** you are, ***** , that's for sure"*

Reporter: *"How long is it since you've been to Fyshwick Markets?"*

Prime Minister Keating: *"Not long, not long. In fact if you get down to woollies at Manuka on Saturday I'd probably run over you with a trolley as I did another journo recently."*

On the Coalition Party

"Honourable Members opposite are a joke."

"They are irrelevant, useless and immoral."

"...they insist on being mugs, Mr Speaker, absolute mugs."

"The Opposition crowd could not raffle a chook in a pub"

"Honourable Members opposite squeal like stuck pigs"

On former Prime Minister Bob Hawke

*"Now listen mate," [to John Browne, Minister of Sport, who was proposing a 110 per cent tax deduction for contributions to a Sports Foundation] "you're not getting 110 per cent. You can forget it. This is a ***** Boulevard Hotel special, this is. The trouble is we are dealing with a sports junkie here [gesturing towards Bob Hawke]. I go out for a piss and they pull this one on me. Well that's the last time I leave you two alone. From now on, I'm sticking to you two like shit to a blanket"*

On Former Labour politician, Jim McClelland (on the phone):

*"That you Jim? Paul Keating here. Just because you swallowed a ***** dictionary when you were about 15 doesn't give you the right to pour a bucket of **** over the rest of us."*

On Fund Managers:

"...these donkeys..." "It must get right up their nose, quaffing down the red wine at these fashionable eateries in Bent Street and Collins Street, with the Prime Minister calling them donkeys - but donkeys they are."

(Humorous excerpts reprinted with permission from ConvictCreations.com)