

CANCY



A close-up photograph of a black and white parking sign that reads "ONE HOUR PARKING". A white sticker with the word "DAILY" is affixed to the sign. Below the main text, there is smaller, partially legible text that appears to say "NO TOY CAR" and "FROM 10:00 AM TO 5:00 PM".

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invisibleLINES

THE HISTORY OF BEDLAM

When we talk about Bedlam, we're talking about two cities split into numerous districts, neighborhoods, and warzones. Folks are always angling for control of new sectors, constantly changing the invisible lines that tell you where you're free to roam and where you should keep the fuck out of. To make this all easier to digest, we'll first split Bedlam into its biggest sectors, the cities that give this area its nom de guerre: Bedford and Lamrose.

Two cities make up the area colloquially known as Bedlam: Bedford and Lamrose. A man-made river splits the two cities with the Lamrose on the southeastern banks and Bedford resting on the northwestern shore. Lamrose is the oldest, stemming from the original settlement that put stakes in the ground two centuries ago. Much as the rust belt cities, Lamrose boomed during the age of American ingenuity but quickly went to ground as the industries left taking their paychecks with them. Those who could afford to move did. Those who couldn't, struggled to survive.

Bedford counts the Catholics and the corporations as its cornerstones. The city center at the heart serves as the seat of power for both cities, the former having surrendered its sovereignty a decade back. This not only gives those in power here a stranglehold on the entire area but gives them a dumping ground for the unsavory elements that threaten to sully Bedford.

CHAPTER ONE: INVISIBLE LINES

The Artifice River that cuts through the two was created as part of Bedford's "revitalization" project to give the area a landmark (as well as to separate the well-to-do Bedford from the constantly-in-decline Lamrose but that doesn't look nearly as pretty on a postcard).

LAMROSE

Lamrose began as a city of the future, built on the burgeoning steel industry and automotive possibilities that withered on the vine before all the jobs were shipped off to countries with more lax labor laws and a cheaper workforce. The collapse of its economic infrastructure left Lamrose vulnerable to predatory development, causing much of it to fall into decline. Those who remember might compare the darker parts of Lamrose to the Times Square of the 70s and 80s or the less desirable areas of modern Detroit.

More than anything, the city is tired. It has seen too much, endured too long, and now slouches upon its land, embittered and cynical in its old age. There is no joy, no life, no sense of hope in the streets. But hope does exist, pocketed within the hearts of the few of dare stand against the tide of entropy that threatens to swallow Lamrose whole.

Lamrose grew organically so the lines that define its internal districts and zones are anything but geometrically inspired. When you think of Lamrose, think curving roads, cloverleaf intersections, and uneven block sizes. A map looks more like a kid playing with a spirograph than a trained draftsman using a t-square. But that's part of its charm, and where the area gets its feel of a colony done good.

The city's interior is a mishmash of upkeep and degradation. It's not all grime and gloom in Lamrose but the ghettos are not relegated to the outskirts; districts of ill-repute dot the landscape. Driving a mile down a major road shows the city's almost schizophrenic sense of place: theater district, sagging hotel, city center, slum, quaint residential neighborhood, gun store. In recent years, the less desirable areas have pushed the livable zones into the minority.

BRICKTOWN

The heyday of Lamrose is not entirely forgotten. Fossils of failed reconstruction can be unearthed throughout the city's many districts but the oldest remnants are found in the part of the city that existed before the city: the nine square blocks known as Bricktown.

The district gets its name primarily from its brick-paved streets but also the many red- and brown-faced buildings that stand in its heart. Bricktown was built on the remains of the original settlement and predates the districts of the outgrowth by over a century. The land beneath the bricks didn't see development before a group of industrious entrepreneurs realized it fell in line

STREETS OF BEGLAM

with other manufacturing centers in the area, providing them with an eager, pre-existing workforce. So Bricktown grew, and Lamrose from it, until a city proper sprung from its seeds. Incorporated in the 1930s, Lamrose was formally founded with the district now known as Bricktown serving as a Philadelphia to the new city center's District of Columbia. Lamrose attracted a lot of development, laying down a bedrock of industry that served the area well for decades to come. By the time the Summer of Love rolled around, Lamrose was fulfilling its promise as a city of the future.

Bricktown initially survived gentrification due to a half-hearted attempted to treat the original city site as a sort-of landmark but eventually it became too far left behind for any nominal amount of investment to pay off. From a budgetary standpoint, it made more sense to let Bricktown decay while funneling cashflow to the parts of the city that look good from the waterfront

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CHAPTER ONE: INVISIBLE LINES

and on postcards (whatever amount of cashflow was left after filling the pockets of the city councilfolk and crooked contractors, that is).

As the district was left to its devices, the local criminal enterprises looking for a base of operations moved into the mostly-ignored area of Bricktown. As years passed, more and more vice moved in growing this once-unassuming square of post-war architecture into a thriving den of iniquity. Prostitution and the drug trade became Bricktown's primary contributions to local economy which allowed criminal mini-empires to rise and infect all of Lamrose.

While the municipal leaders were profiting off Lamrose and quietly selling off its assets (which led to its eventual assumption by Bedford), the denizens of the districts were coming to terms with the fact they were on their own. The majority of the citizenry felt helpless, seeing it as easier to pack up and move away than try to fix their home city's issues from within, leaving pockets for more infection to root and fester.

But a certain portion of the population didn't move and refused to surrender: the working girls (and boys) of Bricktown. As police patrolling and protection dwindled, unscrupulous men forcefully took over the district's sex trade—beating and doping the workers into submission while strongarming every last drop of profit. The world's oldest profession quickly twisted into the world's second oldest crime, leaving the professionals to look out for themselves.

Which they did.

While the woman called Queenie is generally regarded as the instigator of this revolution, nothing would have changed if the call to arms hadn't been answered by a group. The working girls (and boys) of Bricktown rose up and beat back the pushers and pimps who had kept them down for so long. A war raged on the streets and many were left broken and beaten in its wake. The bodies were never recovered by either side. When the dust settled and the blood congealed, the working girls (and boys) stood victorious over their oppressors.

But Queenie knew it was only a matter of time before the pushers and pimps regrouped, stronger than ever. So she set about training her army, turning this gang of streetgirls and funboys into a band of vigilantes called Valkyries. Along with this honing of skills came a broadening of focus. The Valkyries quickly expanded their protected land to include all the districts of Lamrose. Slowly, but steadily, they are turning the tide of corruption in the Poor City. While Bricktown is a far shot from an amusement park, it is a safer area to ply one's trade than it had been ten years prior.

Bricktown is Valkyrie HQ, where Queenie and her select cadre run the show. Though few question her, Queenie is not a dictator. The simple fact is she usually knows best and all but the greenest recruits know better than to refute her orders without having a damned good counter-argument.

Red Rover

This famed blues club is a bit of a Bricktown secret. People find this place primarily via word-of-mouth and the in-crowd. Amongst the music fans of Bedlam, the Rover is the best club in town for fans of true blues. It's also a nice getaway from the city's daily stresses, a place to unwind and be amongst peers on neutral ground.

Patrons walk one flight down from street level to get to Red Rover's main entrance. Past the thick mahogany door is a foyer where folks are vetted by one of the two very large security personnel stationed there during business hours. Beyond is the club proper, a large semi-circular room with a stage in the far center, tables covering most of the floor, and a bar to the right. Regulars know of the second entrance down the alley but they never tell anyone about it. Seems folks find it through happenstance or sheer dumb luck. Knowing the second entrance is a bit of status symbol among music fans.

And music is the primary draw. Jerry Johnson's Blues Trio is a regular headliner as are the Steadybeats and the Gourneau Twins. Carlito Lima, the owner, keeps illicit trade out of his club. He's made many an example out of those who have tried to move product on his property. While the families and the syndicates would love to count the Rover amongst their trading grounds, no one in power wants to cross Carlito. Those who do break the rules are usually penny-ante pushers and folks too green to know better.

Outside of business hours, the only reason an outsider would be let into the club is if they have business with Carlito or one of the usual bands. If you're a regular, a real insider, and you find yourself in a spot of trouble, Carlito's not a bad guy to turn to. The aging Cuban immigrant has helped quite a few folks get out of bad situations but he's not a charity; his aid carries the price of a favor, with interest. Better to be indebted to Carlito than some of the unsavories in Bedlam, sure, but you're still indebted.

Queenie's

The head of the Valkyries operates out of a former strip club turned vigilante HQ. As with a lot of establishments in Bricktown, no neon sign calls out its presence and nothing but a heavy with a chip on her shoulder greets you as you come inside. In fact, very few are allowed inside. Valkyries come and go as they please from the joint's main rooms but outsiders allowed entry are rare.

Clients who pose problems are often dragged inside to be taught a lesson about manners. Predators caught in the act—those who aren't dealt with on the street—can also find themselves captive in one of the many private rooms converted into "discipline dens" by Queenie and her staff.

The inner sanctum, what once was the club's management office, is now Queenie's court. Even being a Valkyrie isn't enough to guarantee entry to the

throne room; Queenie only allows the top, those who show true dedication and commitment, or those Valkyries who have overstepped their bounds and need to be reminded of the purpose and hierarchy they are to follow.

THE PLAZA

Rightford Plaza was a last ditch effort by Lamrose's city council to breathe life into the failing local economy. The idea was to turn the southern tip of the city into a retail destination, big enough and bright enough to bring in out-of-town money to bolster local businesses and give Lamrose a new identity. Mid-tier chain stores moved in first, followed by a couple higher-class cornerstones. The secondaries filled in next—the support businesses such as restaurants and gas stations and motels—and for a few years it looked like the city council's desperate ploy was going to pay off.

While there were certainly spikes in the economy, the boom never happened and all the new businesses that marched in at the beginning eventually stomped back out. This left a void quickly filled by discount furniture stores, dollar stores, predatory lending services, flea markets, and the like. Despite this infestation, more old businesses were lost than new ones gained.

Nowadays, the Plaza is a ghost town. Sure, the latter day business are still there, and some bright-eyed mom-and-pop shops start up now and then, but very few survive more than a year or so. Lamrose Center Mall sits in the middle, surrounded by the empty skeletons of strip malls past where you will find most of the aforementioned businesses.

OLD CITY CENTER

Lamrose never had a huge city center but what it did have boasted inspired architecture and impressive statuary. While it hasn't fallen into the level of disrepair other districts have, the Old City Center is a bit dingy and it's a shame such potential is essentially squandered. Still, look past the layer of dirt and you will glimpse the Lamrose of the past, the one that held so much potential and promise before the grifter, politicians, and captains of industry pissed its future away.

Nestled in the upper left of the Lamrose half of Bedlam, the old city hall building takes up the majority of a circle, with a variety of roads spinning out from it like spokes on a wheel.

City Hall

What once was the seat of power for the area now serves as the outlying offices for the less sexy municipal agencies. The offices of vital records, housing development for everything east of the river, and such now fill the old wooden-doored offices and drab fluorescence-lit blue tiles of the old City Hall.

THE MOTORCADE

The last remnant of the height of Lamrose's manufacturing history, the Motorcade lines what is now the edge of the Artifice River. Once a bustling street full of automotive factories and supporting businesses, the Motorcade is now a row of abandoned buildings turned into crack dens, hobo hotels, and perpetual construction sites.

A few strip plazas still have businesses, mainly urban clothing stores, bars, and check-cashing joints. They cater almost entirely to those who live close—nobody outside the residents frequent the Motorcade unless they're looking for or making trouble.

Half the factories are shut up permanently. Any materials of value are long since stripped—even the copper in the wiring is gone. The rest of the factories have been converted into warehouse space. They were gutted, whatever assets existed were sold or destroyed, and now they house stock of dubious legality and origin.

Hannigan's Pub

One of the oldest standing houses in Lamrose, Hannigan's sits in a converted library that has also served as a hospital, brewery, and hotel over the years. The place is a dive but it has a loyal clientele who keep the lights on. Rumors abound that the backroom is the base of operations for one of the lower-level gangs who don't yet have enough influence to take over something bigger.

Dick Gregson runs the place. Once upon a time a Hannigan may have owned the joint but accounts disagree on that point. The sign says it was established in 1836, but that's a lie designed to give the place character. Hannigan's opened in its current form in 1946 following a fire that turned its previous incarnation's stock into so much ash.

If you're looking for someone who might be hiding in the backstreets of Lamrose, Dick's a good person to make contact with. He knows quite a bit for a guy who swears he doesn't see or hear anything.

WAREHOUSE DISTRICT

Another remnant of Lamrose's glory days is the concrete stretch of faceless buildings in the city's Warehouse District. Once a major shipping hub for the district, the loss of factories was a domino that toppled all other industries once it fell. The warehouses clung on for another decade but eventually all of them closed down.

Nothing has moved in to take the place of these empty buildings but that's not to say they don't have their purposes. Now owned by the various crime families, these warehouses act as storage for illicit goods, meeting halls, and nice quiet places to have a short and forceful conversation.

THE TRACK AT MONTEREY

Lamrose has also become a dumping ground for the sins the management of Bedford would rather keep out of the G*d-fearing side of the river. Take the Douglas G. Oliver Memorial Racetrack at the corner of Monterey St. and Duquesne Ave. Called simply “the track at Monterey”, it’s the largest betting track in the state and sees folks from miles around filling its seats throughout the week. Champion racer Pride Before the Fall and its primary rider AJ Weber got their start at Monterey.

Not exactly neutral territory for the various crime families, nothing overt is ever done on-site. Plenty of meetings are held in its private boxes and executive lounges. While most of these are intra-family strike talks, some are inter-family alliances and even the occasional peace accord. Emphasis on occasional.

Off-site betting is done at a variety of watering holes and with numerous bookies on both sides. The horses are mostly mafia-owned with independent suffering unforeseen accidents and a cold reception by the track officials.

THE CASINO STRIP

And the tour of iniquity continues with these brightly-hued homages to the Biblical moneychangers. While the Strip has nothing on the likes of Vegas and Atlantic City, it draws enough folks to keep the one-armed bandits busy.

Aside from the string of cheap-as-grease fast food joints and laundromats and no-tell motels along the Strip, you’ll find a handful of gambling houses, bad carpets, brass furnishings, and all. The three most notable are:

Slotnick’s

The first casino to out down stakes in Lamrose was the Silver Horse Casino back in 1979. It didn’t fare all that well, as the owner failed to make the right connections with those who have great interest in the prospect of redistributing large amounts of money. Where it could have thrived, owner Jerry Wahl zigged instead and zagged, and the casino shuttered in under five years.

You know what it takes for a casino to fail? The owner suffering a freak accident and ending up turned into bits and dumped into the sewer helps.

Luckily for the local economy, the kind members of the Giletti Crime Syndicate stepped in and turned the Silver Horse into Slotnick’s, a brightly-colored (with lots of yellow and green) five-story destination for those who drawn to card flips and spinning wheels.

Considering this ain’t Vegas, Slotnick’s looks pretty great and is very modern. The Gilettis have put a lot of money in keeping the establishment current and attractions of a high-level. Many B-level country stars and second-run rockers take the Slotnick Center Stage to a packed crowd of those whose fortunes were left on the casino floor.