

## En Arcadia Est

A sleek black car with tinted window pulls up in front of you. An impossibly huge man unfolds himself from the driver's seat. Chewing a cigar he looks at you through a cloud of bluish smoke with dark beady eyes.

"You're the one." He says, "Get in."

"Arcadia hardly lives up to the name, some of her other names, well that's a different story all together. No, paradise she ain't, but she is a Dark Beauty, the Bete Noir, long and cool and sexy and more often than not downright deadly. Kinda like my last girlfriend, if you know what I mean.

"You probably know what the history books say about her, how a group of errant pilgrims somehow wound up in what would be Orchard Bay, driven off course by a storm, and put down roots. Except that ain't what you might call the truth. No, way I heard it their leader, old Reverend Gillmore himself, knew where they was going all along. See, him and his bunch wasn't what you would call orthodox, if you know what I mean. The Father they prayed to didn't have nothing to do with Jesus. Gillmore's crew heard Him callin' over in the Old World and followed His Voice across the Ocean wide to the New, get themselves a foothold before the competition if you know what I mean.

"Yeah, see Arcadia, she had a bad name right from the start. Outside folks mostly left it alone, except when they didn't have no choice. As colonies go it weren't exactly thriving. Until Rev. Gillmore's grandson come along. Turned Arcadia into a smuggler's den, and when smuggling wasn't paying well enough they took to pirating. The Legendary terror of the north, Blackheart himself, he was a Gilmore too. Don't believe what the mayor's office tells you, them Gilmore's was rotten from the start and just got worse as the years went on. And to think, there is talk of His Honor running for Governor. Not that all of them was pirates or smugglers, most was respectable things like slavers and lawyers and preachers and such. You know how it is.

"Well, the city thrived in its own dark way, kinda like a cancerous beauty mark on the face of the new nation. The pirating, smuggling, and slaving made it a thriving port, and once started it just grew. Businesses and homes and factories and schools and slums and mansions, all springing up out of the grown every which a way. There ain't no straight streets here. Some says that's on purpose, that there is a design to it; and then there is some that says that design ain't exactly human, if you know what I mean. Twain said that a man couldn't spit in this town for fear of hitting a church nor shake hands with a stranger for fear of going to hell. It was like that here then, like that here now too.

"More weirdness in this town that I can rightly say. Oh yeah, we got drugs and crime and vice same as any city, more than some. Part of the history, if you know what I mean. But around here they run with a little different edge. Say you was in some alley, chasing some young punk with an old lady's purse. Maybe he turns on you. Maybe he has a knife or maybe he has a gun or maybe he's go the name of something dark and wicked that comes when it's called. Maybe it gets rough. Maybe you have to kill him. And maybe a couple of nights later you see him again, all glassy eyed and looking a little pale or moving a little slow. They say when you join a gang you join for life, around here it maybe a little longer than that.

"Or maybe you are out in Appleton, over there across the bridge where its all two car garages and elm trees and barking dogs. They are Arcadia too, even if they don't like

to think about it. Take a look around in them fine planned neighborhoods. Look at the little crests on the signposts and the little medallions on the street corners. Wonder what they are for, huh? Let's just say that sometimes when those lilywhite upper middle class kids raise a little hell, they Raise a Little Hell, if you know what I mean.

“Well we are almost there now, and the boss wants to see you mighty quick, so I will just give you these last few words of advice kid. Arcadia is a bad place but it's a beautiful place. It wants saving, it needs saving. Sure there are a lot of wicked wicked people in this town, some so evil they ain't exactly people no more. But there are a lot of decent hardworking folks that don't know, and don't want to know, nothing about that. Its them, what get up everyday and go to work believing the world is exactly what it looks like, believing the history they was told in school. They are why you are here. Arcadia, or something in her, calls out for champions for those people. Some she makes and some she drafts, but they come to her aid just the same. Problem is, there is something in this place, that dark something that called the Gilmore's across the ocean. It seeps into you, gets into your bones, and it can take you. Make you its own. Make you something you don't want to be, and if it can't its going to try and kill you. So watch your step. There is too many of them and not enough of us.

“Oh, and don't go swimming down by Blackheart's Rocks. You might not like yourself when you come back out.”

#### Welcome to the War

Arcadia is a setting of Pulp Noir Occult Heroes. What do I mean by that? First, it is Pulp. It is larger than life, a setting for two-fisted fighters, mysterious magicians, and adventuring scientists. It's got cults and organized crime. It's got zeppelins and ancient idols and machine pistols. It's got underground lairs and swanky jazz clubs. It's got masked figures in swirling cloaks and sun drenched art deco skyscrapers. It is Pulp.

Second, it is Noir. It is dark, a setting where corruption is part of everyone's life and morality is mostly just shades of gray. The punk in the street has a sick mother to care for. The priest has a drug habit, among other things. The bad cops are on the take and the good cops cross the line because they need to or they just want to. The mob is everywhere and the mayor is at the top of the chain. It is Noir.

It is Occult, the setting is more than just touched with the supernatural, it's infused with it. Bank robbers come equipped with tommy guns and demonic back up. Trolls lurk under bridges. The streets form eldritch runes. Spirits of vengeance walk the night and ghost ships prowl the harbor, but nothing is as it seems. It is Occult.

It is about Heroes. That would be you. Driven by some inner need for justice and righteousness you are trying really hard to do the Right Thing. Since it is Pulp that means you are going to a little bit larger than life yourself, a character who thinks and acts and talks big. Since it is Noir that means you are going to have some inner struggles of your own to deal with, sometimes making the right choice is going to be hard to do. Since it is Occult that means you will deal with the hidden world of dark things, you might even be magic yourself but you will at least be familiar with the supernatural. In the end it all comes down to Saving the Day, and what you are willing to do to make that happen. It is about Heroes.

## The Role of Heroes

As a heroic figure in Arcadia you are a little more than mortal. While generally following the d20 Modern rule set, at first level each player chooses a Heroic Template to add his or her PC. This template adjusts your Effective Character Level (ECL), allowing even 1<sup>st</sup> level Heroes to deal with greater challenges. In addition to the initial benefits the template also provides PCs with some additional abilities as they increase in levels.

**The Avenger:** Driven by the need to right past wrongs, the Avenger sees guilt and punishes it. His abilities and weapons are supernatural, granted by a higher power to bring justice to the world. When corrupted he doles out violence for every imagined slight, lashing out at the world around him.

**The Champion:** Chosen of a place or a cause, the Champion protects the helpless and defends the underdog. His passion gives him strength, his actions win him favor with the masses. When corrupted he chooses his own at the expense of others, betraying that which he loves in the process.

**The Detective:** Unhappy with secrets, the Detective wants to find out the Truth. He has brains and he has charm and he will find out what he wants to know, one way or the other. When corrupted he becomes a manipulator, using what he knows against others.

**The Fighter:** Frustrated by what passes for justice, the Fighter takes up the cause with his own two fists. He is the brawler or the martial artists who has no greater joy than to punch evil square in the nose. When corrupted he loves the means more than the ends, taking joy in every pain.

**The Genius:** Consumed with knowing, the Genius is the herald of Tomorrow. He uses his vast intellect to build the future out of the world of today. When corrupted he embraces technology over humanity, using people as mere numbers in his equations.

**The Magician:** Blessed with insight, the Magician knows the secrets of the Hidden World and how to use them. He is blessed with a talent for magic. When corrupted he will trade everything for more power.

**The Savage:** Born into a more primeval world, the Savage brings the law of the jungle to the streets. He has strength born of nature and an uncanny insight into the ways of Life. When corrupted he throws off the nobility of wild for the passions of the beast.

**The Totem:** An avatar of supernatural forces, the Totem is more than man. He embraces the nature of his iconic self to fight the dark nature of man. When corrupted his iconic nature is set loose from the morality of man and becomes something truly alien.