

The following pages are a preview of:

Arcanum City Secrets

The Nexus Season One:
Unseen World

By Sara Blake

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Thanks for reading!

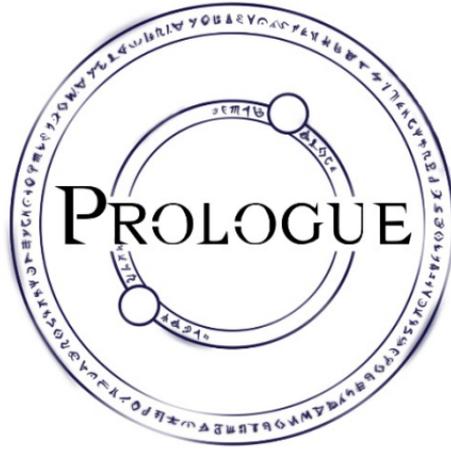
Sara Blake

ARCANUM CITY SECRETS



SEASON ONE - EPISODE ONE

Sara Blake



ARCANUM CITY SECRETS

There's something going on in this city. Something beneath the surface, something unseen that, nonetheless, everyone sees. It's a strangeness, a weirdness, a difference: Arcanum is not like other places.

And sure, every place has its urban

legends, its local myths, its regional folklore. Something a friend's cousin's brother's neighbor overheard, that their great-grandma's best friend claimed to have seen, something with no explanation that really, when you break it down, has plenty of possible explanations.

But in Arcanum, it's different. Those stories don't just come from an acquaintance of a relative of a friend. They aren't decades-old whisperings of little girls telling each other ghost stories. In Arcanum, the stories you hear are firsthand. Everyone has a story. Or three. Everyone here has seen something, heard something, felt something that didn't seem quite right. Quite... normal. We've all heard a whisper in the dark, seen something unbelievable just out of reach, only to have it vanish when we turned our head.

Nobody's quite sure exactly what they saw, what they heard. Our experiences are always vague enough to talk ourselves out of later, enough to dismiss them. We pretend Arcanum really is like other places, that the legends are untrue, the

stories made up.

That it's all just in our heads.

And that's where this blog comes in. Because we can only pretend a thing is just in our heads until we put those heads together, and discover we're seeing the same things. That we're all, every one of us, having the same strange experiences.

Welcome to Arcanum City Secrets: A place for us to share our stories and solve the mysteries together. I'll be reporting on whatever strangeness I can find, and you, hopefully, will be sharing your experiences in the comments. Together, we'll figure this city out. Together, we'll solve Arcanum's secrets once and for all.

Kaden read through the blog post one last time, his mouse cursor hovering over the *publish* button. When he clicked the mouse, the blog would officially be live. He paused, savoring the moment, and then, with all the importance and deliberateness he could fit into a single mouse click, he hit the button.

...And then realized he still had to update

the settings in the dashboard to *actually* publish the site, sort of diminishing the impact. But regardless, a few administrative tasks later, Kaden's long-planned project, the *Arcanum City Secrets* blog, was live.

He looked out the window to see the sun had set as he was finishing his inaugural post. A growl in his stomach reminded him how long it had been since he'd looked up from the computer for food. He stood, stretched, and picked up his phone. Confirming the battery was fully charged, he headed out to get some tacos and then to track down his first official story.



LIGHTS OUT

“**A**re you seriously going to eat all of that?”

Gina looked at the multiple dishes in front of her: a mushroom and Swiss cheeseburger shared a paper-lined plastic basket with a massive pile of French fries, a separate basket held a for-the-table sized

portion of fried zucchini, and a medium-sized bowl contained a salad doused with so much ranch dressing it was pushing the boundary between salad and soup. “First of all, fuck you,” she said, politely. “Food shaming is rude. Second, yes, I am. And then I’m going to order pie.”

Arjun rolled his deep, brown eyes. “I’m not food shaming. I’m well aware you have... special needs. But someone as thin as you eating that much in one sitting draws attention. People will wonder.”

“Whatever,” Gina said, around a mouthful of cheeseburger. He was leaning into his British accent extra hard tonight. He did that when he was feeling superior. Translation: he did that a lot. “Fuck them, too.” She gestured to the room at large with a French fry before popping it into her mouth.

Arjun looked around the diner, as though following Gina’s fried-potato pointer. She could see him about to open his mouth to make another comment when the lights went out. The music

coming from speakers in the corners ended abruptly, and Gina could hear the electric wind-down of freezers and other appliances shutting off in the back.

“Again?” a diner at a nearby table asked.

“This is getting ridiculous,” said someone else. “Third time this week. This city needs to do something about the power grid.”

Gina and Arjun looked at each other through the gloom. Arjun appeared to have forgotten about his food, instead looking out the diner window, trying to see what was going on in the street outside. Gina’s gaze followed his, but she did not stop eating. A girl had needs.

“We need to go,” Arjun said, surprising no one.

Gina took fifteen seconds to mourn the pie that would not be, then agreed.

She used her basket liners to wrap up her burger and as many fries and zucchini as she could fit. The salad, alas, was forfeit, unless she asked the server to bring her a box, which was clearly not going to happen. Arjun had already dropped two fifty-dollar bills onto the table and was standing up; they

weren't waiting on a check, let alone a box.

"Are you coming?" he asked, already starting toward the door.

"Yeah, yeah," Gina agreed, shoving a bite of the gloriously gloppy salad into her mouth as she stood. She followed him out of the diner and into the darkened streets of Arcanum.

Kaden was relieved when the girl in the truck handed him his tacos; he'd been worried the blackout may have hit before his food was cooked. "Thanks," he said, dropping a couple of dollars into the tip jar. "Good luck with the power."

"Thanks back. And yeah, this has been happening so much we've been thinking about getting a generator, but they're so loud and the emissions are horrible. And solar's outside our budget for now."

"Mari!" a voice barked from inside the

taco truck.

She rolled her eyes. “Sorry, gotta go. See ya next time.”

Kaden dropped a few extra dollars into the tip jar when she’d turned her back, hoping maybe it would help in some small way toward that solar-powered truck.

His plan had been to eat before digging into his investigation, but the investigation had come to him. The *Tio’s Tacos* truck had a regular home here on Ash Street, just outside Sylvan Park, along with several others. Clusters of picnic tables stood to either side of the park entrance, completing the little outdoor food court. The seating area was buzzing with people talking about the blackout.

“I tell you, it ain’t natural,” said an older man eating a sausage roll to another with a paper boat filled with beignets.

“How you mean?” the other man asked, dunking a beignet into a coffee cup with a *Bayou Brew* logo on it. “It’s summer. Blackouts are pretty common in the summertime, what with everybody blastin’ their air conditioning.”

“People blast the AC during the day,” Sausage Roll said. “These outages have all been after dark. You don’t think that’s weird?”

Coffee Cup shrugged. “I dunno. AC’s higher during the day, sure, but most people keep it on ‘round the clock. And nighttime’s when they’re home watching tv, cooking dinner, using all their other appliances.”

The table next to the men opened up, and Kaden grabbed it. He sat facing them, but pulled out his phone to fiddle with so it wouldn’t be obvious he was listening.

“You ask me,” said a third man, sitting down to join the first two. “It’s all these damned new-fangled vehicles.”

“Oh, here we go again,” Sausage Roll said. “The electric cars are a sign of the apocalypse.”

Kaden got up again; he wasn’t going to hear anything useful from these three. He carried his last taco around, listening in on other conversations.

“—saw lights in the sky,” a woman said.

“Lights in the sky?” someone asked, sounding skeptical.

Kaden located the source of the voices, an older woman and a teenage boy, likely a grandmother and grandson.

“Yes,” the woman said. “I know how it sounds, but I tell you, I’ve lived in Arcanum all my life and things happen here. I saw lights in the sky, like they’d been waiting for the blackout as a sign.”

“You sound like one of those UFO nuts dad talks to online,” the kid said, picking through his French fries. “I suppose the lights floated around, couldn’t possibly be a plane?”

“No!” she said, pointing upward. “They looked like that!”



“I wonder if any of these trucks have pie.”

Arjun rolled his eyes and kept walking. “We haven’t got time for pie.”

“There’s always time for pie,” Gina said,

tossing her empty food wrappers into a trash bin. “Where are we even going?”

“Something’s not right about these power outages.”

“Agreed,” she said. “But where are we *going?*”

Arjun stopped walking. She was right, dammit. He hated when she was right. Something was going on, something that probably required their attention, but they had no idea what it was. Being up and moving had felt like doing something, but it wasn’t.

“So, can I look for pie, then? Or—ooo! That truck has beignets!”

“Will you focus?” Arjun snapped. She got harder and harder to deal with the closer it got to the full moon.

“I am focused.”

“Will you focus on something other than food?”

“Give me something else to focus on, and sure.”

“How about that?” he asked, pointing to the sky.

“Well... fuck.”

The sky was alight with vibrant, colored lights. Pink and violet, shimmering across the sky like light hitting an oil slick.

“Is that the aurora borealis?” Gina asked.

“It certainly looks like it,” Arjun said. “But considering we’re well south of the Northern Lights’ usual visibility range, I have my doubts.”

“We should watch, see if anything changes,” Gina said.

Arjun wanted to argue on general principle, but he couldn’t. “Fine,” he said. “Go get your bloody doughnuts. Get me a coffee while you’re at it if they have any that’s still hot.” It was going to be a long night.

Sara Blake

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