

# The Curse of the Jet Abacus

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# Overview

## Dramatis personae

### Lord Carpenter's family

- **Daffyd, Lord Carpenter** (male human, 58, deceased): a Snakesford nobleman and engineer; part-owner of the Carpenter & Thargsson company
- **Fiona Smythe, Lady Carpenter** (female human, 24): Lord Carpenter's estranged daughter and heir
- **Rodrick Smythe** (male human, 30): Fiona's husband; a member of the banned Guild of Metalworkers; owner of the rival Smythe, Smythe & Cooper company

### Employees of Carpenter & Thargsson

- **Mr Skruthsson** (male goblin, 40): a lawyer; the executor of Lord Carpenter's estate
- **Uthar Thargsson** (male goblin, 72): an engineer; part owner of Carpenter & Thargsson; retired
- **Mistress Marsil Tanner** (female human, 28): an air mage and magical engineer; a member of the Guild of Mages
- **Eric Hill** (male human, 19): an engineer

### Staff of the Carpenter estate

- **Mr Spoon** (male human, 80): the butler and steward
- **Mrs Whittle** (female human, 81): the cook and housekeeper
- **Bessie** (female human, 15): the housemaid and char

### Staff of Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights, a high-class club and brothel

- **Zaxtlass Ssizzith** (male yuan-ti, 38): the proprietor; a black market magic broker
- **Isavel** (female human, 23): a prostitute; Lord Carpenter's favourite
- **Livy** (female yuan-ti, 12): an odd jobs girl

### House Varchessen, the most powerful drow house in the city

- **Zhaundree Varchessen** (female drow, 308): a powerful mage; ilharess
- **Gaussryne Varchessen** (female drow, 240): a warrior and water mage; steward; Zhaundree's younger sister

### Others

- **Commander Rose** (male human, 49): an officer of the Snakesford Constabulary
- **Ssuztli Zzussash** (male yuan-ti, 42): patriarch of a wealthy and conservative yuan-ti family
- **Grand Master Charavon** (male human, 50): fire mage; head of the Order of the Sun
- **Master Alfin Rosseler** (male human, 55): earth mage; head of the Guild of Mages

## Investigators

- **Pharolin Orvresslar** (male drider, 104): magistrate of House Chathradin; trained soldier and bounty hunter
- **Zzuxsartha Ssestl** (female yuan-ti, 14): bred by the Ssestl family for her heightened sense of taste and smell
- **Detective Alma Ostler** (female human, 45): veteran of Snakesford Constabulary; private investigator
- **Special Constable Ugruk Grathnarsson** (male goblin, 19): engineering consultant to the Snakesford Constabulary

## Yuan-ti name pronunciation guide

**Zaxtlass Ssizzith** *zash-tlas sizz-ith*

**Ssuztli Zzussash** *sooz-tli zoos-ash*

**Zzuxsartha Ssestl** *zoosh-sar-tha ses-t'l*

**Zzyzhezztlyss Ssestl** *zizh-ezz-tliss ses-t'l*

**Zzizzizth** *zizz-izth*

## What is publically known

Three days ago Lord Carpenter was **found dead** in his manor under suspicious circumstances. His death is **politically alarming** because his company is responsible for an important **railway construction project** of interest to the drow and yuan-ti nations. Eric Hill, **another engineer** highly placed in the project, was **reported missing** the day after the murder. The drow and yuan-ti are concerned not only that someone may be trying to **sabotage** the project, but that someone may be planning an **assassination** attempt during the **grand opening**, which will be attended by their respective heads of state. The Snakesford Council of Lords has agreed to include drow and yuan-ti representatives in the investigation, and a **diverse team** has been assembled: a veteran human detective, a goblin engineering consultant, a drider magistrate and a yuan-ti bred to track people by scent.

The press has made a big deal of the **reported theft of the Jet Abacus**, an artifact which is reputed to have some magical significance and which the late Lord Carpenter had recently purchased. Rumours also abound that some dispute over **Lord Carpenter's will** has been raised by his estranged daughter Fiona, now Lady Carpenter.

## What actually happened

Eric Hill **accidentally killed** Carpenter in a scuffle after confronting him over some **personal history**. Information about the issue was **leaked** to Eric by Fiona, who is allied with a **competing company**, in an attempt to persuade Eric to **turn against** her father and agree to **sabotage** his project. Fiona did not realise the **real significance** of the information, and did not intend for her father to be harmed. Eric has gone into **hiding**, and some **goblin friends** from the company are helping him. He is helping them to continue his **crucial work** on the project. Eric's **presence** at the manor on the day of the murder is unknown, because he was let in by Bessie the housemaid, who is **covering** for him.

The **theft** of the abacus is **unrelated** to the murder. The abacus is a **powerful magical amplifier** of value to several magical factions in the city. It was stolen through a convoluted plan involving a **trained pet spider** by **Zaxtlass**

**Ssizzith**, a yuan-ti who runs a magical black market from his high-class club and brothel. Zaxtlass was hired by the yuan-ti **Zzussash** family, who want to use the abacus in an **assassination plot**. Zaxtlass got **greedy**, and instead of sticking to his agreement he has set up an **auction** to which he has invited the **Zzussash** and **House Varchessen**.

**Gaussryne Varchessen** visited Carpenter on the day of the murder to make him an **offer for the abacus**, partially desiring to profit from its use and partially because her sister Zhaundree knows it to be dangerous and wants it kept safe. The meeting **went well** and she was expecting him to agree to sell it to her very soon. **Marsil Tanner** broke into Carpenter's manor on the day of the murder to attempt to **steal the abacus for the guild**, but it was already gone.

Lord Carpenter recently **revised his will—cutting Fiona out** completely, leaving most of his **fortune** to **Isavel**, and splitting his fifty percent **share in the company** between **Eric Hill** and **Marsil Tanner**. Mr Skruthsson knows that this revised copy exists, but doesn't know where it is. Fiona produced an **older copy**, in which she is named as a beneficiary, but Mr Skruthsson **refused to accept it as valid** and insisted that a **thorough search** be made for the new version. Fiona would like to **find it first**, so that she can make it disappear.

## What will happen next

The investigators will probably begin investigating the murder and the theft as a **single crime**. They will probably find the **updated will**, in which case Mr Skruthsson will ask them to try to locate Isavel. They may discover that Fiona is responsible for **sabotaging** her father's company, although it will be difficult to get anything to stick to her.

They should soon discover that the crimes are **not related**, and that the abacus is a **dangerous artifact** which many factions in the city would like to possess. If they locate Eric Hill, they may choose to **arrest him** and charge him with the murder, or they may choose to try to **blame it on someone else**.

They may discover that Zaxtlass was **responsible** for the theft, or that the Zzussash family or House Varchessen are **involved** in the auction, but in order to **charge** any of these important people with the crime they will need to **catch them red-handed** during the sale. Some of the investigators may pose as **potential buyers** in order to infiltrate the auction.

The auction may optionally be **attacked** by the fanatical Order of the Sun, or **raided** by the Guild of Mages or the Snakesford Constabulary. The investigators may play a role in **deciding** in whose hands the abacus will end up—a decision which will determine the fate of the city.

## Summary of player characters

### Pharolin Orvresslar

Pharolin is a male **dridrer** in the service of the underground House Chathradin. Driders are rarely seen in Snakesford, so people are likely to **gawk at him** wherever he goes—this is at least partially because he is **heavily armoured** and carrying a large amount of **weaponry**. Humans and goblins in Snakesford know little about driders and thus are not particularly prejudiced against them. Yuan-ti tend to like them because they appreciate them as a fine work of bioengineering. Drow tend to regard them with distaste—Gaussryne Varchessen is too polite to let it show, and Zhaundree Varchessen is too oblivious to social norms to be both-

ered at all, but minor drow NPCs such as guards at the Varchessen estate will probably be quite rude to him.

Pharolin can go anywhere a humanoid can go. His spider body is proportional in size to his torso, and like a spider he can tuck in his legs quite a lot to fit through narrow doorways—although he is not always comfortable in Snakesford's narrowest streets.

### Zzuxsartha Ssestl

Zzuxsartha is a teenage yuan-ti girl **bred and trained** to be an investigator. She has spent her whole life in her father's estate in the yuan-ti kingdom and has **little practical experience** of the world. She is likely to be amazed by everyday things. Yuan-ti are common in the city and people don't give them a second glance, but they may look at Zzuxsartha strangely if she keeps **licking and sniffing things**.

Zzuxsartha has a **heightened sense of taste and smell**, and can recognise the scents of specific people. A descriptive smell has been provided for each NPC. Zzuxsartha also has a chance of smelling **fear or nervousness** in people's sweat. Note that this is **not an all-powerful ability**—the scent must either be **fresh** or **frequently reinforced**. She is unlikely to be able to identify the writer of a letter which has passed through many hands, for example.

She has a non-lethal **venomous bite** which causes unconsciousness. She is carrying two magical **potions**: a **healing salve** which permanently replaces injured tissue with snake flesh, and a **serum** made with her blood which makes the drinker inclined to **obey her**. Other yuan-ti have a random chance of being partially or completely **immune** to Zzuxsartha's potions and venom.

### Detective Alma Ostler

Alma is a human woman. She is a former policewoman turned private investigator, who became **disillusioned** by the level of corruption in the city. She **knows the city** very well, and is familiar with **local politics** and **organised crime**.

Alma is being **blackmailed** into taking this case by Commander Rose, who knows that she destroyed evidence on her last case and let a criminal go free.

### Special Constable Ugruk Grathnarsson

Ugruk is a young goblin man. He is an **engineering consultant** to the constabulary. He is following an **unusual career path** for a goblin, which is something of which older, more conservative goblins are likely to disapprove. Younger goblins are likely to react to him much more favourably, and are more likely to **talk to him about goblin business** than to his companions.

## Timeline

### History

- 50 years ago** Ifor Carpenter is made Lord Carpenter by the Snakesford Council of Lords.
- 50 years ago** Mr Spoon and Mr Whittle are hired to serve in the new Lord Carpenter's household.
- 45 years ago** Conflict between goblin workshops and human craftsmen's guilds escalates to rioting in the streets. All guilds are disbanded on the orders of the council, with the exception of the Guild of Mages.
- 26 years ago** Daffyd Carpenter marries.
- 24 years ago** Fiona Carpenter is born; her mother dies in childbirth.
- 15 years ago** Ifor Carpenter dies; Daffyd inherits his title.
- 10 years ago** Fiona Carpenter sent to boarding school.
- 4 years ago** Fiona Carpenter marries Rodrick Smythe.
- 3 years ago** Mrs Whittle hires Bessie.
- 2 years ago** C&T and SS&C compete for the council contract for the construction of Snakesford Station. C&T wins.
- 1 year ago** Lord Carpenter decides to update his will to exclude Fiona and make Isavel the main beneficiary.

### Recent events

- 3 days ago (afternoon)** Gaussryne Varchessen visits Lord Carpenter in his study; is let in and out by Mr Spoon.
- 3 days ago (late afternoon)** Mr Spoon falls asleep.
- 3 days ago (late afternoon)** Jet Abacus stolen from the smoking room by a spider, brought to Livy and delivered to Zaxtlass Ssizzith.
- 3 days ago (early evening)** Eric Hill visits Lord Carpenter in his study and kills him; is let in and out by Bessie.
- 3 days ago (late evening)** Marsil Tanner breaks into the smoking room to find the abacus gone; bypasses the wards to avoid triggering them.
- 3 days ago (late at night)** Mrs Whittle finds the study locked; hears no response when knocking. She wakes up Mr Spoon, who opens the door with his spare key. They find the body, and Mrs Whittle raises the alarm. The constabulary opens an investigation. Drow and yuan-ti nations are informed by magical courier.
- Yesterday (morning)** The ilharess of House Chathradin sends Pharolin to Snakesford. Yuan-ti nobles persuade the Ssestl family to send Zzuksartha. Commander Rose makes Alma an offer she cannot refuse. Mr Skruthsson and Lady Carpenter have a dispute over Lord Carpenter's will. Eric Hill is absent from work.
- Yesterday (afternoon)** Constables visit Snakesford Station and speak to Mr Skruthsson, who reports Eric Hill missing. Zaxtlass tells the Zzussassh about the auction and sends an invitation to House Varchessen.

**Yesterday (late at night)** Pharolin and Zzuksartha arrive in Snakeford.

**Today (morning)** The investigators meet at the offices of the constabulary.

### Scheduled events

- Tonight** Auction of the Jet Abacus at Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights.
- One week from now** A meeting of the Snakesford Council of Lords, at which the possible reinstatement of the Guild of Metalworkers will be put to a vote.
- One month from now** The grand opening of Snakesford Station.

## Background

*This story takes place in a world which is an approximate cultural and technological analogue to 19th century Europe—with the addition of improbable steampunk tech and magic. The world is populated by generic fantasy races such as elves, dwarves and goblins; as well as two staples of the D&D setting: the drow and the yuan-ti. Both of these races have traditionally been portrayed as supernaturally evil villains. In this module, assume that they both have reasonably normal, functioning societies (if not particularly nice ones—but neither was ancient Rome!) and that the ludicrously evil excesses usually attributed to them are either nasty human propaganda or memories of a less civilised time.*

### Drow

These estranged **cousins of the elves** inhabit a vast network of **underground caverns** in the area. Their **matriarchal** society is divided into several **houses**. Today, their frequent infighting is more likely to take the form of **sophisticated political intrigue** than open warfare, but they're not above a bit of **sabotage and assassination**.

Drow worship a **goddess** known as the **Dark Lady**. **Spiders** are believed to be the Lady's favoured creatures, and thus they are revered in drow society and frequently kept as **pets**. Some spiders found in the underground reach **enormous sizes**.

Like elves, most drow are able to call upon some form of **innate magic**.

### Yuan-ti

Since the dawn of history, the yuan-ti have been **remaking themselves** using their magic-enhanced **bioengineering skills**. They worship a **snake deity** which they call the **Great Serpent**, and they are still seeking the **perfect blend of humanoid and reptilian** qualities to pass on to future generations. Exactly what this blend is, and how they will know when they have found it, is a subject of constant philosophical debate. Different families have **very strong opinions** about how this search should take place.

Some yuan-ti look **almost human**, and they usually serve as the **public faces** of their families when they need to negotiate with outsiders. Others have prominent **snake-like** characteristics—such as a snake's tail in place of legs, or a snake's head—and some look almost completely like snakes. Regardless of their appearance, they are all able to speak their common tongue—one full of **sibilants**, of course.

### Driders

A few centuries ago, a wealthy drow house embroiled in a long-running feud with a neighbour **commissioned yuan-ti flesh mages** to craft a **hybrid army** of creatures which combined drow and spider characteristics. They believed that the Lady would smile upon this auspicious combination and reward their religious fervour with a swift military victory.

The yuan-ti followed a tried and trusted template, and created the **centaur-like driders**—**drow** from the waist up; **giant spider** from the waist down. Incredibly fast, strong and agile, they were **formidable warriors**, and their masters' victory seemed assured. Regrettably, many powerful drow houses strongly **disapproved** of this unnatural meddling with the bloodline, and came to the aid of the opposing side—**wiping** the errant house from existence.

The surviving driders were **scattered** throughout the drow territories, and were **social pariahs** for many decades. Certain houses grudgingly came to appreciate their **martial prowess** and found **dirty and dangerous work** for them—in armies, and later also in civilian police forces.

Driders are mostly drow, and can **interbreed with drow**. Their children appear to be completely normal drow—the **spider genes** are inactive unless an individual possesses a full set. Thus it is possible for two drow to be surprised by a drider child. Such children are usually **abandoned**, and most grow up in orphanages.

### Goblins

Long dismissed by others as barbaric primitives, the **smart, dexterous and adaptable** goblins have quietly made themselves indispensable as skilled **craftsmen and engineers**—especially during the unfolding **industrial revolution**. Wherever they have come into **conflict** with conservative **human guilds**, they have inevitably won—whatever humans may think of goblins as people, they have to admit that goblin ingenuity brings results.

Goblins organise themselves into **workshops** by trade, and these professional allegiances can outweigh **blood ties**. Once the two were almost always the same, but in a bustling metropolis with a large goblin population it is not uncommon for young goblins to be **apprenticed** outside their families, following an interest or talent which their relatives do not share.

In spite of their relatively comfortable current position in urban society, goblins have **not forgotten** the disdain in which they were once held—while they are impeccably polite to their non-goblin neighbours, they don't entirely trust them. Goblins **always put goblins first**.

### Humans

These **resilient omnivores** can survive almost anywhere, and are found all around the world. Human settlers **migrated** into this area from the **north** at the behest of nobles wishing to **expand their territory**. Ultimately this expansion plan proved more trouble than it was worth—but although the northern cities **abandoned** their colonies, the colonies proved to be quite tenacious.

The largest surviving human settlement in the **south** is the city of **Snakesford**. In the **north**, the dominant political power is the **Northern Union**, a collection of human city states, elven nations and dwarven kingdoms which have formed a close alliance.

The dominant human **religion** in the south is the faith of the **Two Gods**: the Mother, the goddess of the sun, life and light; and the Father, the god of the moon, death and darkness. This religion has also been **adopted** by most urban **goblins**, who have come to interpret the animal totems worshipped by their ancestors as facets of the Mother.

In the **north**, humans have increasingly become influenced by the **culture of the elves**, and in recent centuries the faith of the Two Gods has been **sidelined** in favour of various interpretations of the **elven religion** and its large pantheon. An extreme example of this is the **militant Order of the Sun**, which reveres the **elven sun god** in his **wrathful** aspect above all others.

## Snakesford

Once a semi-permanent camp at the **intersection of a busy road and a river**, Snakesford grew into a fortified town. In earlier times, it was perpetually defending itself against raids from **yuan-ti to the south** and **drow underneath**, and on a few occasions was the unwilling host of **territorial disputes** between the two. Eventually, however, the three civilisations began to resolve their differences more **amicably**, and Snakesford became a convenient **trade hub**. Soon it **cut all ties of fealty** to its distant parent cities in the north, and became **independent**.

Today it is a **bustling and prosperous** human city, although one with a reputation for **decadence, crime and corruption**. It maintains somewhat **cold diplomatic relations** with the **Northern Union**. It has a much **closer relationship** with the nations of the **yuan-ti** and the **drow**, which are right on its doorstep. Many drow and yuan-ti have **purchased land** in Snakesford, and now occupy entire **neighbourhoods**. The **demographics** of the city have shifted, and humans barely maintain their historical majority.

The city is run by a **council of lords**, which comprises a few dozen **hereditary nobles**. In recent years, noble titles—and thereby seats on the council—have been **granted to commoners** who have made a significant contribution to the economic wellbeing of the city. Titles are **inherited** according to the law of **equal primogeniture**: children inherit before siblings, and gender is irrelevant.

As a body, the council is motivated mainly by **profit** and a desire to **maintain the status quo**. **Only humans** may sit on the council, but wealthy drow and yuan-ti are known to **“own” certain councillors**.

The **Order of the Sun** has spread even to Snakesford, where it has found **support among humans** who believe that the city should be **purged** of its unsavoury elements: criminals, corrupt nobles and merchants, and usually also anyone who **isn't human**. Once an easily dismissed **fringe group**, it has gained some **powerful backers** and has become increasingly **brazen** in its activities—openly styling itself after ancient **military orders of knights**. The **Northern Union** embassy has been accused of **aiding** the order in an attempt to **destabilise** the city, and the order's followers are suspected of practicing **illicit fire magic**, but neither of these allegations has ever been proved.

A lot of **technological innovation** in the city has been driven by **goblins** finding **workarounds** for technologies on which the old city guilds held **monopolies**. Their success eventually led to the **guilds' obsolescence and demise**. After competition between the goblins and the guilds erupted into **rioting** in the streets, the council sided with the goblins and all the **guilds were banned**—with the exception of the **Guild of Mages**, which is permitted to exist under a **special charter** in exchange for its absolute **loyalty** to the council. The **Guild of Metalworkers** has become a **secret society** which constantly **schemes** to be reinstated to its former glory. Metalworkers consider themselves to be a **rational foil** to the Order of the Sun, and they have a special **loathing for goblins**.

**Magic use is heavily regulated**. Use of **powerful raw magic** within the city limits is **almost entirely illegal**. Magic is available to the **general public**, but only through **enchanted items** and **potions** which have a controlled and predictable effect. The **Guild of Mages** polices magic use among **humans and goblins** with an **iron fist**. **Drow and yuan-ti** are free to use **their own magic** on their **private property**, but they need **guild permits** in order to practice

it in the rest of the city, or to **sell magical products and services** to human and goblin citizens. Of course a **thriving black market** exists, and there is widespread off-label use of common potions.

A massive **engineering project** is about to culminate in the **joining** of the **drow subway system** and the **yuan-ti rail network**, via a **new station** which has been built in Snakesford. Several **competing engineering firms** have vied for the lucrative construction contracts, and drow and yuan-ti **diplomats** in the city have been supervising their progress. The **yuan-ti king** and the **drow empress** will be arriving in the city in a **month's time** for the **grand opening**.

# Plot

## Carpenter's family history

Carpenter's **father** Ifor, the first Lord Carpenter, was **born a commoner**. He **founded** the Carpenter & Thargsson company with the goblin **Uthar Thargsson**, and almost single-handedly revolutionised the city's carpentry industry by opening several **factories** for the mass production of screws, hinges and other **small metal parts**. He was rewarded by the council with a **title** and a small estate.

Daffyd was Ifor's only son. He had a **difficult childhood** after his father's elevation to the nobility. It took him many years to earn the partial and grudging **acceptance of his new peers**, who considered him a *nouveau riche* upstart and **mocked him** for his coarse accent and lack of courtly manners.

By the time Ifor died, Daffyd had given up on ever **fully fitting into** Snakesford's upper class. He **took over management** of his father's business, considering wealth to be an acceptable substitute for respect. He was an enthusiastic early adopter of new **goblin technology**, and did not hesitate to **replace obsolete manual labour** with modern equipment. This often resulted in extremely unpopular **mass retrenchments** of workers—something Carpenter had done for him through many **layers of intermediaries** to avoid the unpleasant fallout.

Carpenter married a noblewoman from a poor family, who died giving birth to their daughter, **Fiona**. Carpenter **doted** on his only heir, determined to give her a **better upbringing** than his own—he wanted her to be a **proper lady** and find a respectable **noble husband**. He sent her to music lessons and deportment classes, completely disregarding her **own wishes** to follow him into the **family business** and cutting her out of it completely. This disagreement between them grew into a **bitter feud**. When Fiona married **Rodrick Smythe**—a **common engineer** who owned a **rival engineering firm**, Smythe, Smythe & Cooper—Carpenter considered this a **betrayal** on every possible level. By the time of his death, father and daughter were completely **estranged**.

Fiona was heavily influenced by the **political leanings** of her husband, who was a secret member of the **banned Guild of Metalworkers**. Although she held no particular prejudice against goblins, she came to **support the guild** in its efforts to be **reinstated**, and intends to **vote in its favour** at an upcoming council meeting.

## Industrial sabotage and unintended consequences

C&T and SS&C **competed fiercely** for the council's contract to build the **Snakesford station**. Carpenter's ongoing feud with his daughter made their contest **deeply personal**, and Carpenter drew on every council contact he had to **ensure that he would win**.

After C&T's victory, SS&C turned to **dirty tricks** to attempt to **sabotage** their rival's efforts on the project and thereby **discredit** them before the council. They **bribed** disgruntled employees to perform minor acts of **sabotage**, and successfully **slowed** the project by several months, forcing everyone to work frequent overtime. Fiona has been the **driving force** behind these acts—Rodrick **talks big**, but doesn't have the stomach for this kind of subterfuge. He is a little afraid of his wife.

Recently, Fiona discovered that the young engineer **Eric Hill**, who was considered the **most important person** to the project after her father, **donated** almost his entire monthly salary to various **charities** which supported **retrenched factory workers**. She believed that if he were to discover her father's unsavoury history of **closing down factories**, he could well be persuaded to **turn against him**—and to deal the project a far more **serious setback** by damaging the complex pulley control system at the core of the station.

Fiona did not realise that this revelation would have a far more **personal significance** to Eric: his **mother** had been retrenched from one of Carpenter's **screw factories**, and **died young** in abject poverty after being unable to find another job. Eric grew up in an **orphanage**, and only managed to reach his lofty position through a combination of luck and skill—he was hired as an odd jobs boy by **Thargsson's workshop**, and was quickly promoted to an apprentice when he showed a natural talent for the job.

Eric said nothing about this to the SS&C agents who approached him, vaguely agreeing to think about helping them with the sabotage. Instead, he went to Carpenter's manor to **confront him directly**. He was admitted by **Bessie** (the char) while the elderly butler (Mr Spoon) was **asleep** and the **deaf** housekeeper was busy in the kitchen. Carpenter **met him** in his study. The **confrontation** rapidly turned into an **argument** when Carpenter showed **little remorse** for what he considered a sound business decision. The argument turned into a **scuffle**. Eric **pushed** Carpenter to the ground, **accidentally** killing him—he struck his head on the **corner of his desk** as he fell.

Eric managed to **regain his composure** enough to take Carpenter's keys and **lock the study door**. He **left** the manor, telling Bessie that Carpenter was **working in his office** and did not wish to be disturbed.

He is currently **hiding out** with some **goblin colleagues** from the workshop, who are helping him out of friendship and loyalty—they consider him to be a **honorary goblin**. He is **conflicted** over his actions. He is **angry** at Carpenter's callousness and not particularly sorry that he's dead—but he feels terribly **guilty** for the **trouble** he knows he has caused to **Thargsson**, his mentor.

Eric knows that it's **likely** that the pulley control system **can't be completed** without him, and has been asking his friends to **make some modifications** on his behalf. They have been **sneaking** into the control room at night with his keys, and carrying out his instructions. Marsil Tanner hasn't noticed anything because she is preoccupied with guild business, and Thargsson has been too busy supervising the other construction.

## Carpenter's will

Carpenter's **title and estate** must go to his **daughter**, who is his heir—but he was free to leave his **private property** to anyone he liked. This included his **shares** in the company, all his **money** and any **possessions** which are not considered **part of the manor**.

**Fiona** has presented an **old copy** of the will in which she is named as the **main beneficiary**. Mr Skruthsson, the executor of Carpenter's estate, has **refused to accept it** as valid because he knows for certain that Carpenter had recently **revised the will**. Skruthsson had not yet received a copy because Carpenter had been too busy to discuss it. Carpenter had been **secretive** about the revisions, and Skruthsson does not know what the will's contents are.

Fiona was **outraged**, and demanded that Skruthsson abide by the latest version that is in his possession, but the normally mild-mannered Skruthsson unwaveringly **insisted** that a **thorough search** be made for the updated version.

The updated version of the will is in a **hidden safe** in Lord Carpenter's study, where the investigators will probably find it. Fiona is at the manor and has been **searching for it** fruitlessly—the safe was installed after her departure.

Furious and distraught over Fiona's betrayal, Carpenter **cut her out** completely. He divided his **shares** in the company equally between **Eric Hill** and **Marsil Tanner**, whom he considered his most promising employees. Since Carpenter owned **half** the company, this leaves each of them with a **quarter** (Uthar Thargsson has always owned the **other half**). Carpenter left generous sums of money to all of his household staff, but the **bulk of his fortune** is to go to a woman described only as "his darling **Isavel**".

If the investigators **deliver the will** to Mr Skruthsson, he will **reluctantly** inform them of Lord Carpenter's **frequent excursions to Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights**, and venture a guess that the lady in question is a "**friend**" whom he visited at this establishment.

## The Jet Abacus

The **Jet Abacus** is an ancient artifact with **great magical power**: when used in an appropriate ritual, it can **alter the balance** between the elemental forces—in the hands of a capable mage, it can wreak unimaginable **havoc and devastation**.

It has developed a **reputation** as a **cursed** object because anyone who bragged too loudly that they possessed it was likely to be divested of it quite forcibly. Its exact origin is not known—a few decades ago it was one of several objects with a magical history which were the subject of frequent **squabbles** between wealthy noble **collectors**. Carpenter bought it in a quiet private sale from the descendants of its last owner, who didn't really want to take responsibility for it.

He wasn't particularly careful about keeping it a **secret**—he considered himself far too rational and sensible to believe in **superstitious stories** about a curse. Of course, as soon as various **magical factions** in the city caught wind of the abacus, they began to **plot** to acquire it for themselves.

None of these factions are eager to reveal the **true value** of the abacus to the police or the general public—if they are discovered to be interested in it, they are likely to **downplay** its significance, presenting it as a **magical curiosity** of some historical importance, or preferably not even magical at all.

## The coup plot

The **Guild of Mages** has long chafed under the **restrictions** imposed on them by the **council**. They would like the city much better if they were **in charge** of it, and they see the abacus as their **path to power**. The mere **threat** of its use as a weapon should be enough to allow them to seize control of the city in a bloodless coup—but they realise that they might need to level a few city blocks to show the council that **they mean business**.

When Carpenter had **need for a mage** in the railway construction project, the guild sent him **Mistress Marsil Tanner**—with orders to get close to Carpenter and **secure the abacus** for the guild by any means necessary. When her tentative attempts to **seduce** him fell flat, she attempted to usurp the position of his estranged **daughter** in his affections, with limited success. He did come to think of her as a **valued**

**protégée**, but he **kept his distance**, and did not—as she had hoped—ever invite her **into his home**.

Eventually, she decided to break in and **steal** the abacus, confident that her magical skill would easily get her past the manor's **store-bought wards** and **elderly staff**. Unfortunately by the time she did this—on the **night of the murder**—the abacus was **already gone**.

The guild has begun a **frantic search** for the artifact, while assuring the constabulary and the council that it's a **harmless trinket** which has been made the subject of a superstitious legend by uneducated people. Their efforts have so far turned up **nothing useful**. If they think the constabulary's investigation is getting somewhere, they may send some of their agents to **tail them**.

## The visionary

**Zhaundree**, the **ilhress** of **House Varchessen**, is a **seer** plagued by unpredictable **visions**. She is convinced that if the abacus falls into any hands other than her own, the city will be **devastated by war and flame**—which, as it turns out, is quite an accurate prediction.

Her **younger sister Gaussryne** is a capable soldier and **administrator** who actually runs the house, and shields her sister from a lot of the unpleasantness of local politics. Gaussryne is only too happy to help her sister to **obtain the abacus**. She believes that they have both the **clout** to defend it and the **magical know-how** to use it to its full potential: earth-moving, irrigation, artificial lighting—and hundreds of other **applications** of elemental magic on a massive scale.

House Varchessen has become increasingly **sidelined** from drow politics—its wealth was built on **trade** between the surface and the underground, but once the **railway** is complete the drow will have less need for a **middleman**. Control of the abacus would make the house an **economic power** to be reckoned with—and of course its **military threat** wouldn't hurt either.

The sisters tried **various approaches** to attempt to persuade Carpenter to part with the abacus. At first Gaussryne simply offered him increasingly large sums of money for a **historical curiosity** of no magical value. When that failed, a frustrated Zhaundree bypassed her sister and sent Carpenter a **letter**—a **warning** that the abacus was incredibly dangerous in the wrong hands and should be disposed of as quickly as possible. She absent-mindedly forgot to sign it, and it came across more **threatening** than she had intended. Thereafter Carpenter grew **suspicious**, and Gaussryne realised that she had to offer at least an abridged version of the **truth**.

Gaussryne **visited** Carpenter in his manor on the **morning of the murder**. She told him that the abacus was a **moderately powerful** magical battery which she would be able to use safely to power a variety of **lucrative enchantments**—offering him a **share of the profits** should he agree to sell it. He appeared to consider this offer **favourably**, and she was **confident** that he would soon contact the house to **negotiate further**. She was **shocked** to hear that he had been **murdered** later that same day, and that the abacus had been **stolen**.

Recently, Gaussryne received an **invitation** from a certain black market broker who claims to be selling the abacus at an **auction**. Gaussryne intends to **purchase** the item if she can—she does, after all, have plentiful funds!—but she is taking some **backup** with her in case that approach doesn't work.

## The assassination plot

The **Zzussassh** are a family of yuan-ti with **extremist views**. They believe that the species is **stagnating** under the ineffectual rule of a weak, **pacifist** king, and that the yuan-ti bloodline can only be **improved** if it is tested in a time of great **adversity**. They think it's time for **war**—and what better way to start a war than by **assassinating** the yuan-ti king, the drow empress and half the Snakesford council in one fell swoop?

The **grand opening** of the Snakesford station is to take place **underground**, in an enclosed tunnel. Ssuzztli Zzussassh, the head of the family, has a clever plan to use the abacus in a ritual to **remove the air** from the tunnel while it is packed with dignitaries and spectators. There is little hope that anyone important will make it out alive through the throng of choking, panicking people—except of course for the Zzussassh themselves, who have quietly **modified themselves** to be able to **hold their breath** for extended periods of time.

The Zzussassh are good at grandiose schemes, but bad at breaking in and entering. To **obtain the abacus**, they **enlisted** the aid of **Zaxtlass Ssizzith**, a known black market magic broker. They relied a little too much on **species loyalty** which Zaxtlass does not possess. After acquiring the artifact, he insisted on being **paid double** the agreed amount—and when they **refused** he informed them that he would be **auctioning** the item off instead.

The Zzussassh are very wealthy, but they have a **cash flow problem**—they have spent most of the year **buying up weapons**, certain that their plot would succeed. They don't have very much money to pay Zaxtlass, but they're planning to **bluff** for as long as possible and attempt to **seize the abacus violently** if they are outbid.

## The cleansing flame

For years, **Grand Master Charavon** of the **Order of the Sun** has **secretly** been training his **flame templars** in the use of **fire magic**, **shielded** from the eyes of the guild by **enchantments** provided by his allies in the **Northern Union**. He hopes that in a few years' time he might have enough competent holy knights to spark a **civil war** in the city.

He dreams of **obtaining the abacus** for himself—with it, he could **boost the power** of his followers' fire magic **tenfold**—and with that **holy flame** he could **purge the evil** from Snakesford in **one glorious day**. The corrupt parliament would be the first to go, followed shortly by the drow and yuan-ti districts which are a festering pustule on the face of the city.

Grand Master Charavon has **no idea** where the abacus is, and his followers aren't **subtle** enough to conduct any sort of **investigation**—but if some soul with a guilty conscience were to make an informative **confession**, the temple could rapidly muster a **small squad** of flame templars to seize the item by any means necessary. Payment is not a likely option.

## The theft and the auction

**Zaxtlass Ssizzith** was **contracted** by the **Zzussassh** family to **steal** the abacus. He has experience in all sorts of illegal magical trade, and he was delighted to help out. He might not have been so eager had he known that his business partners were out to **murder the majority of his clientele**, but he **didn't know** what the Zzussassh wanted the abacus for—just that they were willing to **pay a lot of money** for it.

Zaxtlass had for some time been fascinated by the **pet spider** craze which was sweeping the city, and saw many interesting applications of an **intelligent, fast and nimble** animal to his criminal activities. He **trained** little spiders to recognise **replicas** of the abacus inside buildings and carry them out to **handlers** waiting outside. Every time Carpenter came to visit his favourite companion, **Isavel**, Zaxtlass ensured that he went home with an **eight-legged passenger** curled up in his pocket. He sent his **odd jobs girl**, Livy, to hang around in the street outside the manor disguised as a **street urchin**, and **pocket** whatever the spiders brought her.

At first they got several cigar boxes, spectacle cases and other **small rectangular things**. Zaxtlass **refined** his spiders and **reassured** the increasingly impatient Zzussassh that matters were well in hand. By the time his plan **succeeded**—on the day of Carpenter's murder—he realised that he could be asking for a **lot more money** from his associates. He demanded that they **double his payment**—and when they **refused**, he announced that he was going to **auction** the artifact off. If they wanted it, they would have to outbid other potential buyers.

Of course, Zaxtlass wasn't stupid enough to invite the **Guild of Mages** to the sale of a **stolen magical item**. He did, however, invite the drow of **House Varchessen**: he knows that their ilharess is a mage and that they have **lots and lots of money**—they are sure to **drive the price up**.

The auction is to take place in a **magically warded back room** of Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights—it's where Zaxtlass normally conducts the sale of dangerous materials to dangerous people.

Because Zaxtlass **doesn't know** what the abacus does, he doesn't fully comprehend the **magnitude of the stakes**—and that it's entirely possible that he will **end up dead** or his club will **catch on fire**. His invited guests are planning to grit their teeth and **play by his rules** at first—but the loser is unlikely to **withdraw gracefully**.

It is possible that the auction will be **gategcrashed** by some decidedly unwelcome guests. The **Guild of Mages** has informants everywhere, and the **Order of the Sun** hears confessions from all kinds of unlikely people. If either of these factions arrives on the scene, **chaos** is sure to erupt.

# Rules

*A brief introduction to The Window roleplaying system*

## The Three Precepts

The intent and flavour of the rules is described by three precepts:

- Everything about a Window character is described with adjectives rather than numbers.
- It is the actor's responsibility to play their role realistically.
- A good story is the central goal.

## Traits and Skills

Traits (i.e. stats) and Skills are described using adjectives. Each adjective is also associated with a die on the competency scale (see next section). The die is what is rolled when the Trait or Skill is tested.

The Traits are: *Strength*, *Agility*, *Health*, *Perception* and *Knowledge* (of the world). None of the characters have the innate ability to perform magic, but Zzuxsartha is equipped with magical potions and Pharolin and Ugruk also have some knowledge of magic.

Skills can be very broad or very specific. It's up to you as the DM to rule whether a particular aspect of a character's prior experience is applicable to the situation.

## Competency Levels

The competency levels (and generic example adjectives) are:

- d4 - Incredible
- d6 - Very High
- d8 - High
- d10 - Above Average
- d12 - Average
- d20 - Below Average
- d30 - Low

## Rolls

Rolls usually require rolling less than or equal to a difficulty set by the DM, on a single die. The default difficulty is 6, but feel free to adjust as you like. Lower rolls are better successes; higher rolls are worse failures.

- **Success Roll:** Used to determine the success of an uncontested action. Roll the appropriate Skill or Trait die against the difficulty.
- **Contest Roll:** Each contestant rolls an appropriate die. Lowest roll wins. Ties are ties.
- **Health Roll:** When a character is struck or suffers other injury, you may call for the player to roll their Health Trait die against a difficulty. If they fail, you may drop their Health Trait by zero or more competency levels (usually they drop to the next biggest die). This is the primary damage mechanic. Pharolin starts with Above-average health, Alma and Zzuxsartha start with Average health, and Ugruk starts with Below-average health.

- **Armour:** Before asking for a Health Roll, you may declare that the character's armour could protect him or her from injury. The player then rolls the armour die against a difficulty. If the roll succeeds, he or she need not make the Health Roll. At your discretion, you may ask the player to roll the armour die again to see whether the armour has sustained serious damage—in which case it will drop by one competency level. Only Pharolin has armour—it's well-made heavy drow armour (d10).

Use rolls sparingly. It is recommended that you save contest rolls for interactions with important antagonists, and resolve encounters with minor NPCs using simple success rolls against a difficulty. Cut-down stats for important NPCs have been provided. Should it become dramatically appropriate for a contested roll to be made against another character, assume his or her trait or skill to be Average (d12).

Assume that NPCs' health is approximately proportional to their training in close combat: skilled brawlers are likely to be of Average or Above-average health, while mages and snipers are more likely to be of Average or Below-average health.

## Searching the crime scene

It is recommended that—rather than requiring each player character to meet a target difficulty before revealing a specific clue to him or her—you ask all the player characters to roll their observation-related Trait or Skill, and parcel out the available information to the characters according to the focus of their Skill and how well they succeeded. For example, Ugruk pays attention to detail and Zzuxsartha notices tastes and smells.

Zzuxsartha is a special case: she can tell individual people apart by smell and taste, and she may be able to pick up scents which people have left in places where they have recently been. It is recommended that you take note of how well Zzuxsartha has smelled a particular place, and give her the opportunity to recall successfully smelled smells later with another check made using the same Skill.

## Magic

None of the player characters in this module have the ability to perform magic, but there are some NPCs who do. A character who can do magic has a Magic trait, and a description of the flavour of magic which they can perform.

A character must make a successful check using the Magic trait in order to perform magic (if the character is using magic continuously, for example during a battle, make checks at some appropriate interval). The Magic trait behaves like the Health trait—every failure causes it to be reduced by one competency level. When it has been reduced to Low (d30), the character may still attempt to perform magic, but any further failures will begin to affect his or her Health trait!

## Scenes

### The offices of the Snakesford Constabulary

The investigators meet at the **offices of the constabulary**, where they are introduced to each other and **briefed** on the case by **Commander Rose**. They are given a **dossier** of information collected so far during the preliminary investigation.

#### Commander Rose

*Smells like old boots and stale coffee*

Like Alma Ostler, Commander Rose is a **veteran** of the constabulary whose **ideals have been crushed** by prolonged exposure to Snakesford's **corruption**. Unlike Alma, Rose has **made his peace** with his situation and is attempting to run the constabulary as best he can within the **political limitations** imposed on him by his superiors.

He will impress upon the visiting investigators that, regardless of how things might be done where they come from, in Snakesford criminals are **arrested and tried**, not summarily executed. He will warn Alma that he will not be pleased if the investigators **embarrass** the constabulary in front of the council. Specifically, he will emphasize the need for **compelling evidence** to be provided if **important people** are to be **accused** of some kind of crime. He will instruct the investigators to **inform him** before they do anything which could have **political repercussions**.

#### The contents of the dossier

1. The report of **constables on the scene**: Constables Porter and Hrungasdottir were on their regular patrol in the affluent neighbourhood where Carpenter's estate was located. They followed the sound of screams to Birch Row, where they found an elderly woman in a nightgown running through the street, crying "murder". She led them to the Carpenter estate, where they found the body of the deceased on the floor of his study, his head bloody. While Constable Porter went to fetch back-up, Constable Hrungasdottir collected a statement from the staff. She was told that Lord Carpenter had received a **single visitor** that day, who was a **drow lady**. Thereafter he had informed staff that he would be working in his study, and asked **not to be disturbed**. He was not seen again until the butler and the housekeeper found his body after opening the locked study with a spare key.
2. The **coroner's report**: Lord Carpenter was killed by a **blow to the head** with an undetermined **blunt object**. The time of death is very unhelpfully estimated as any time between the late afternoon and late evening of the day when the body was discovered. Apart from his fatal injury, he appeared to have been in good health for a man of his age. There is an **inventory** of items found on the deceased—**no keys** were recovered.
3. A report from **constables visiting Snakesford Station**: **Mr Eric Hill**, another important project engineer, had **not arrived at work** that morning and could not be located. **Mr Skruthsson**, the company lawyer who is also the executor of Lord Carpenter's estate, reported that Lord Carpenter had recently **revised his will**, but had not yet provided Mr Skruthsson with a copy. Lady Carpenter is in possession of an older version of the will, but Mr Skruthsson has insisted that the

matter of the inheritance cannot be resolved without a **thorough search** for the new will. Mr Skruthsson also mentioned that he is in possession of several **threatening letters** which had been sent to Lord Carpenter's office at the station—a semi-regular threat from the Guild of Metalworkers, a screed from the Order of the Sun, and one odd letter which doesn't fit the established pattern.

4. A report from **the Guild of Mages: Master Alfin Rosseler** briefly summarises the known history of the **Jet Abacus**—it was an item over which many **wealthy collectors** competed at the turn of the last century, and it eventually **fell out of the public eye**. He concludes that although the chequered history of the item's ownership has spawned public hysteria and many superstitious stories about its supposed powers, the guild has no reason to believe that it possesses any magical properties at all, and considers it at most a **relic of historical value**. The guild does, however, request that the item be **turned over to them** for further study should it be recovered.

Where the investigators go next can vary—the most logical place to start is the **Carpenter estate**, where they can interview the staff. If they wish to speak to **Lady Carpenter**, they will be told that she is currently also there.

Another likely initial destination is **Snakesford Station**, where Mr Skruthsson is waiting with the **threatening letters** which are mentioned in the dossier.

The investigators might also follow some of the more tangential clues immediately, by trying to track down the **drow lady** or attempting to question the **Order of the Sun** or the **Guild of Metalworkers**.

Pharolin knows that **House Varchessen** is the most powerful drow house in the city. Alma and Ugruk may also know this. The headquarters of the **Order of the Sun** are in the recently build Temple of The Sun near the city centre. The **Guild of Metalworkers** is an illegal underground organisation, and as such does not have publically listed contacts—but old metalworker families are suspected of continuing to support the guild in secret, and Alma and Ugruk may know that the **Smythe** family has metalworker ties.

#### Carpenter estate

At Lord Carpenter's manor, the investigators have the opportunity to examine the **study** in which the body was found as well as the **smoking room** from which the abacus was stolen, and to interview all the **staff**. They can also interview **Lady Carpenter** and her **husband**—they are both in the manor because Lady Carpenter is searching for her father's **will**.

The house is equipped with **magical wards** which should alert the inhabitants of any unauthorised entry. The horn which serves as the instrument of an audible alarm is installed in the main passage. Mr Spoon knows that Lord Carpenter had had the wards **installed by a guild mage** several years previously, and that they had been trained to recognise Lord Carpenter and his staff. Anyone else would have to be **let in and out** of the house by Lord Carpenter or a staff member to avoid triggering the alarm.

#### The study

The study has been **cleaned** since the body was taken away—because nobody mentioned that it shouldn't be. If the investigators question Bessie, who did most of the cleaning, she will say that there were "papers and things" **on the floor**,

which she put back on the desk, and a small **blood puddle** on the floor which she mopped up and scrubbed.

If the investigators search the room, they will find various **documents** lying on the desk. Most of them are related to the **railway project**, but a few pages are some old receipts of **renovations** done to a building—it was an old screw factory which was refurbished with new equipment.

If they are observant, they may also see the **bloody mark** on the **corner of the desk** where Lord Carpenter hit his head while falling—Bessie is not very meticulous.

Zzuxsartha will **smell** several people who are not the staff in the room—some of them are of course various responding policemen. She may be able to pick out a scent of **silk and iron (Gaussryne Varchessen)** or **machine oil and whey (Eric Hill)**. If so, she might recognise these people later.

Perceptive investigators may notice that although the **fireplace** in the study is covered with a fine layer of **soot**, the **decorative panel** in the back is **spotlessly clean**. If Bessie is asked about this, she will shrug and say that it just **doesn't get dirty**. Closer examination will reveal a magically **fire-proofed panel**—and behind it, a **hidden safe** with a **combination lock**. A lot of effort went into the safe's elaborate disguise, but the lock itself is not very good. **Ugruk** may be able to open it using his engineering knowledge. Failing that, the investigators can summon a professional **locksmith**. Inside the safe, of course, is the **revised will**.

A thorough search of the room may turn up a **silver orchid lapel pin** stuck between the floor and the wainscoting—it rolled there during the scuffle. None of the household staff will recognise it. Alma may hazard a guess that it is **symbolic** of something, and not simply decorative.

Lord Carpenter's **study key** is nowhere to be found.

### The smoking room

This room houses Lord Carpenter's small **library** and collection of **curiosities**. For another lord this might mean hunting trophies, but Lord Carpenter collected **vintage mechanical devices**. There is an old lathe, a primitive sewing machine, a large framed collection of screws produced by his father's factories, and many similar things. Hanging on one wall is the small **glass-fronted cabinet** where the abacus used to be—the front panel, which appears to have been secured only by a latch, is hanging open.

If the investigators search the room, they may discover **scuffmarks on the windowsill**. The smoking room is on the second storey. Further investigation may uncover **tracks** through the flowerbeds under the window, leading to the back wall of the property. There are **no marks** at all on the wall of the house or the outside wall, which makes the intruder's manner of ascent puzzling—not to mention their apparent ability to breach the wards. Zzuxsartha may pick up a scent of **citrus perfume**—if so, she may recognise **Marsil Tanner** later.

Also inside the smoking room, very observant investigators may discover some **short, fine hairs** on the floor. Anyone who examines them closely will be able to venture a guess that they come from **some kind of animal** rather than a person. It is possible that the investigators will figure out that these are hairs **from a pet spider**, but it's not easy—it should require either a very good knowledge check or a visual or taste comparison to a known sample.

### The Staff

Lord Carpenter lived alone, and kept a small staff: **Mr Spoon** (butler and steward), **Mrs Whittle** (cook and housekeeper) and **Bessie** (housemaid and char).

**Mr Spoon** and **Mrs Whittle** originally served the elder Lord Carpenter, and continued to work for his son after his death. They are **very old** and very opinionated, and have been feuding over control of the household for decades. Neither of them is willing to retire, because that would hand the victory to the other—thus they both intend to stay on in Lady Carpenter's service, provided they are not dismissed. They are likely to disagree over any issue on principle. They are loyal to the family and will not volunteer any gossip, but they will answer questions about the **family's history** if they are asked. They believe that Lady Carpenter **broke her father's heart** after he tried to provide her with the best life possible.

**Bessie** is a recently hired young workhouse girl, and knows less about the family. There is a **part-time gardener** who comes in once a week to tend the grounds. There is no driver attached to the estate; Lord Carpenter made use of a **company driver** who would come to fetch him by prior appointment. Lord Carpenter had sent the driver home on the morning of the murder, and he was not due to return until the following day.

### The Butler (Mr Spoon)

*Smells like mint and mothballs*

Mr Spoon will report that Lord Carpenter was visited by a drow lady on the afternoon of the day of the murder. She **did not mention her name**, but indicated that Lord Carpenter would be expecting her. He also saw that she came in a carriage with two guards, who waited outside the premises. The guards were dressed in **blue and silver livery** (Alma, Ugruk and Pharolin are likely to know that these are the colours of **House Varchessen**).

(Mr Spoon gets **tired easily**, and since Lord Carpenter didn't receive visitors frequently it was common for him to spend most of his day sleeping. He **hasn't mentioned** that after letting the drow lady in and out he took a little nap and remained **sound asleep** until quite late at night. He is feeling a little guilty about this.)

Mr Spoon was **called** to Lord Carpenter's study **late at night** by Mrs Whittle, who was concerned that the door was **locked** and Lord Carpenter was **not answering**. Mr Spoon opened the door with his **spare key**, and they discovered the body. Mrs Whittle then ran outside shouting for help while Mr Spoon woke Bessie. When the constables arrived, Mr Spoon began to check the manor's valuables to see if anything was missing, and discovered that **the Jet Abacus was gone from in its display case** in Lord Carpenter's smoking room. He also noticed that the house's **magical wards** had not gone off.

If asked if he had since found that anything else had been **stolen** from the house, Mr Spoon will begin to complain bitterly about the conduct of Bessie, the char—she is a **workhouse girl** whom Mrs Whittle gave a job out of pity, and therefore Mr Spoon loathes her. He will accuse her of smoking Lord Carpenter's cigar butts (true), drinking alcohol from open bottles (true), sneaking out of the house to meet with boys (true) and stealing things to fence for cigarettes (not true). He will complain about various small things which have **gone missing**—cigar cases, spectacles, etc. Of course, these were all taken by Zaxtlass' trained spiders.

Mr Spoon will also complain that Mrs Whittle gives away leftover food to **local street urchins**—he is particularly incensed that he keeps seeing a **little ginger snake girl** in the kitchen, and is convinced that Mrs Whittle will eventually give her a job too.

### The Cook (Mrs Whittle)

*Smells like delicious, delicious food*

Mrs Whittle is almost completely **deaf**, so the investigators will have to speak up when questioning her. She spent the entire day **down in the kitchen** making pickles, and **couldn't hear** anything from upstairs.

She was **told by Bessie** that Lord Carpenter would be **working in his office** and did not wish to be disturbed. This was not unusual, so she was not surprised when he **did not come to supper** in the evening. However, she became **concerned** later that night that Lord Carpenter **had not eaten** since lunchtime, and took a plate of cold cuts to the study. When she found the **door locked** and heard no response from inside, she became alarmed and summoned Mr Spoon, who opened the door with the **spare key**. When she saw Lord Carpenter's body, Mrs Whittle **ran outside** to raise an alarm.

She is aware of Bessie's various **personal failings**, but is sure that with a bit of **tough love** she will grow up to be a respectable young woman. She will **defend her** against Mr Spoon's accusations, and tearfully assure the investigators that Bessie would **never steal** anything of value from the house—she may also fire back a salvo at Mr Spoon's reputation by complaining that he **sleeps** most of the time. She will likewise speak kindly of the "**ginger snake girl**", an urchin who looked like she had yuan-ti blood—and will mention that she **hasn't seen her** since the day of the murder and is worried that she's going hungry because she's too scared to come back.

Observant investigators may see a **little spider** scuttle across the floor. When Mrs Whittle sees it, she will attempt to shoo it away with a broom, and launch into a tirade about "children these days" getting outlandish pets and abandoning them in the streets—in her day, children were satisfied with a nice cat or a dog.

If the investigators speak to Mrs Whittle **in the kitchen**, Zzuxsartha may pick up a scent of **smoke and cinnamon**—if so, she may recognise **Livy**, Zaxtlass' odd jobs girl, later—she is also Mrs Whittle's "ginger snake girl".

### The Char (Bessie)

*Smells like whiskey and cheap cigarettes*

Bessie is a young woman from a rough background who is hiding a **terrible secret**. She knows that **Eric Hill** came to visit the manor on the evening of the murder—she let him in and out because Mr Spoon was asleep. When he left he was the one who told her that Lord Carpenter was working in his study. She had heard **raised voices** when they were in the study, and Eric had seemed upset, but at the time she thought that he had brought some bad news from the station. She **kept quiet** about the visit when the murder was discovered because she is **in love with Eric**—having spoken to him on previous occasions when he visited the house—and could not believe that he was responsible.

Now she is even more scared to come forward because she knows that she has **lied to the police**—and given her **background and history** she's convinced that **nobody will believe** she had nothing to do with the murder. She is terrified

that she will end up getting **blamed for everything**.

If Bessie is accused of **stealing**, she will tearfully protest her innocence.

### The Smythes

Fiona and Rodrick Smythe are at the manor because Fiona is looking for the revised copy of her father's **will**—so that she can **destroy it** before anyone else can find it. She hasn't found the hidden safe because it was installed after she left.

The investigators have the opportunity to speak to **Fiona**. They may also request to speak to **Rodrick**—they will have to push the issue, because Fiona is well aware that Rodrick is the **weakest link** in her sabotage conspiracy and she wants to avoid having him questioned if she possibly can.

If the investigators reveal that they have found Lord Carpenter's **revised will**, the Smythes will **beat a hasty departure**—undoubtedly to consult their own lawyers.

### Fiona Smythe, Lady Carpenter

- Good at **deflecting questions from her social inferiors** (d8)
- Impenetrable **icy exterior** (d10)

*Smells like red wine and lavender perfume*

Fiona is a **bitter** woman with a **slightly guilty conscience**. For years, her feud with her father has eaten away at her and driven her to perpetrate ever more outrageous acts of **sabotage** against his company (Carpenter & Thargsson) for the benefit of her husband's company (Smythe, Smythe & Cooper). Her driving goal had been to force him to acknowledge her business sense and to **admit that he had been wrong** to exclude her from his company. Now that he is dead, she will **never have satisfaction**. His company may be forced to turn to hers for assistance in completing the project, but this is a **hollow victory**.

Fiona feels guilty about trying to **turn Eric against her father**, and is concerned that this may be somehow **related to his death** - but only knows for sure that **Eric has disappeared**. She doesn't know whether he **sabotaged the control system** at the station, like her agents asked. She regrets ever telling Rodrick about the plan, and is concerned that he will blab everything to the police.

If the investigators reveal the contents of the **revised will** to her, she will be **furious**, and believe that his bequest to some strumpet called Isavel is a **calculated insult** designed to humiliate her in front of the nobility. She will threaten to take **legal action** against the investigators should any mention of the will's contents make its way to the **press**.

Fiona is of course intending to **vote in favour** of the Guild of Metalworkers at the upcoming council meeting; something her father is certain not to have done.

### Rodrick Smythe

- Has some experience in **blaming other people** (d10)
- Not very good at **hiding his emotions** (d20)

*Smells like sweat and venison*

Rodrick spent his entire childhood listening to his father and his friends talk about the **glory days of the Guild of Metalworkers**, to which they all belonged. Rodrick very much likes the idea of the **restoration of the guild**, because he knows it will restore his wealthy but common family's prestige. However, all that Roderick knows how to do is **talk**.

His wife was the driving force behind all his company's sabotage attempts, and Rodrick was happy to **go along** with them and pretend that they were his idea. Now, however, he fears that she has **gone too far**—he is considering the awful possibility that Carpenter's death had something to do with the information his company's agents leaked to Eric Hill. He is terrified that the police will find Eric and make him talk, then find the agents and make them talk—and he is the **next link in the chain**. Fiona has told him that nobody can prove conclusively that either of them was involved—but he was born a commoner, and he hasn't quite got the hang of being able to get away with just about anything.

If he feels sufficiently **cornered and intimidated**, Rodrick will attempt to **deflect the blame** from his family and onto an obvious scapegoat, **the Order of the Sun**. He knows from his sources inside Carpenter & Thargsson about several **threatening letters** sent by the Order, and will draw attention to them. He may embellish the story by claiming that his own company had received similar threats when they were competing for the contract.

Observant investigators may notice that Rodrick is wearing elaborate **hammer-and-anvil cufflinks**. Alma and Ugruk are likely to know that they are a coded symbol of the banned **Guild of Metalworkers**.

If he is asked about—or shown—the **threatening letter** sent by the **Guild of Metalworkers**, Rodrick will **strenuously deny** being a member of the guild himself, protesting that some of his family members were metalworkers but that was **years ago** (he **genuinely doesn't remember** who wrote this specific letter, but he has been **personally involved** in letter-writing before—because making **empty threats** is what he does best. He doesn't think that any of the guild's other letter writers are **capable of violence** either).

## Snakesford station

The station is a large building with several above-ground storeys and **underground levels**—all of which are very much still under construction. The whole site is a hive of **anxious activity**.

Here the investigators can speak to **Uthar Thargsson**, **Marsil Tanner** (the mage), **Mr Skruthsson** (the lawyer), or question **random employees**. They can also **inspect the site**, and in particular the **control room**.

### The site

The upper levels of the station will become a hotel and a restaurant. The railway tracks which stretch all the way to the nearest yuan-ti city lead into the **ground-level platforms**, and the lowest level is connected to **subterranean tunnels** which lead to the nearest drow city. A complicated semi-magical control system is to lower and raise trains between the levels. The **main structure** of the building is **in place**, but a lot of the **fittings have yet to be installed**.

### The control room

The control room is almost completely filled with a **massive, complex machine**. To anyone who is not an engineer it is an incomprehensible **mess of gears and pistons**.

Ugruk, Uthar Thargsson or Marsil Tanner will be able to explain more about the system: a complex feedback mechanism is supposed to **dissassemble** arriving trains into individual compartments, **transport** them between levels and

possibly different platforms with an elaborate pulley system, and **reassemble** them in preparation for departure from the station. **Enchantments** feed high-level information about the station into the system—if she is asked about them, **Marsil Tanner** will say that they are almost complete, but still have to be tested against the rest of the system. The current bottleneck is the need to **refine the parameters** of the mechanical feedback system—this was **Eric's job**, and now that he is missing **Thargsson** has attempted to decipher what he has done so far, with little success.

Observant investigators may notice **cigarette butts** all over the floor, and if they inspect them they will find them to be fresh. The only people with **keys to the control room** are: the late Lord Carpenter, Uthar Thargsson, Marsil Tanner and Eric Hill. The investigators may recall that Carpenter only smoked cigars. Thargsson and Tanner don't smoke at all, and if anyone asks about Eric they will be told that he doesn't smoke either.

If Zzuxsartha successfully picked up **Eric hill's scent** (machine oil and whey) at Carpenter's manor, she may smell something familiar now. She may also smell **two other distinct people** (one who smells of clove cigarettes; one who smells of coffee) who are not any of the people who are supposed to have access to the room. These are two of **Eric's goblin friends** who have been sneaking into the control room at night with Eric's keys to **continue Eric's work** on his behalf. There is a random chance that they will be among the employees interviewed by the investigators, in which case Zzuxsartha may recognise them.

### Mr Skruthsson

*Smells like ink and dust*

**Mr Skruthsson** is a slightly built, soft-spoken goblin.

If the investigators give him Lord Carpenter's **revised will**, he will briefly be **overjoyed**—until he actually reads it, at which point his **face will fall** as he considers the **political fallout**. He will very **reluctantly** reveal that Lord Carpenter made frequent trips to **Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights**, an establishment **near the docks** which he will euphemistically describe as a **club**. He will venture a guess that Isavel is a **"friend"** whom Lord Carpenter was meeting there. He will ask the investigators if they could **discreetly confirm** this theory—he is terrified of Fiona's lawyers, and is concerned that some unsavoury rumour about the will might get out if he is seen going there himself.

Mr Skruthsson will be able to identify the **lapel pin** as one which Lord Carpenter put on when going to visit the club.

He will also hand the investigators the three anonymous **threatening letters** (available as handouts) which were recently sent to the office: one written on behalf of **the Order of the Sun**, which condemns the railway project as a gateway which will admit more corruption into the heart of the city; one purporting to be from **the Guild of Metalworkers** demanding that Lord Carpenter vote in favour of its reinstatement at a council meeting which is to take place in a week's time; and one which warns Carpenter that his continued possession of the Jet Abacus spells doom for him and everyone he cares about and advises him to **dispose of it**. (The last letter was sent by **Zhaundree Varchessen** against her sister's wishes; it was a well-intentioned warning rather than a threat, but she absent-mindedly forgot to sign it. The letter is too old for Zzuxsartha to pick up a clear scent from it.)

Mr Skruthsson will mention that Lord Carpenter had received similar letters from the Order of the Sun and the Metalworkers before, but the letter about the abacus was the only

one of its kind.

## Uthar Thargsson

*Smells like brass and black coffee*

Thargsson had been **enjoying his retirement** when all hell broke loose. He has come in to supervise the construction in an attempt to salvage the situation. He is sorry that Carpenter is dead—he didn't like him as much as he liked his father, but he **respected him professionally**.

If he is informed about the contents of Carpenter's will, he will be **relieved** that Lady Carpenter will not be inheriting the company. Her involvement with the **anti-goblin Guild of Metalworkers** is an open secret among the goblins in the company. Thargsson is not particularly eager to discuss it openly, since he wouldn't want to accuse a noblewoman of having criminal connections, but will voice his suspicions if he is asked directly.

Thargsson is **worried** about Eric Hill's disappearance, not just because he doesn't think he will be able to complete the **control system** in time but because he is **fond of the young man** and has groomed him to be his successor.

He is also somewhat **irritated with Marsil Tanner**, who should be **helping him** figure out the control system but has frequently been **absent from work** since the murder.

## Mistress Marsil Tanner

- Good at **lying for the guild** (d10)
- Skilled at **air magic** (d8)

*Smells like citrus perfume*

Marsil Tanner seems **anxious and distracted**—something which may appear to be normal worry over the fate of the project. She has actually been **preoccupied with guild business**, meeting with other mages and helping to coordinate a **search for the Jet Abacus** using various magical methods. So far she has found nothing, and this has put her on edge. Her guild superiors are **blaming her** for failing to obtain the abacus while it was in an easily accessible and known location, and she is under a **lot of pressure** to get results. She **knows about the guild's plans** to overthrow the council, so she is aware just how much is at stake.

If Marsil Tanner is told that she has **inherited** a quarter of the company, she will be pleasantly surprised.

If Zzuxsartha picked up **Marsil Tanner's scent** (citrus perfume) at Carpenter's manor, she may recognise her now. If the investigators confront her over her **presence at the manor**, she will quite sincerely **deny having anything to do with the murder** and grudgingly **admit that she was trying to steal the abacus**. She will reveal that the abacus is a **lot more dangerous** than the guild has let on, and say that it is vitally important for the guild to recover it so that it **doesn't fall into the wrong hands**.

She may **make a deal** with the investigators to share information about the abacus, if they agree that it should be given to the guild—in which case she will say that it is being kept in some kind of **shielded container** which is immune to scrying, and thus is almost certainly in the hands of a **magic professional**.

Whether the investigators agree to help Marsil or not, she may begin to **tail them discreetly**, hoping that they will lead her to the abacus.

As an **air mage**, Marsil can fly for short distances and create wind to use as a weapon.

## Other employees

*Smell like clove cigarettes or coffee or machine oil or coal or brass*

Some of the **goblin employees** who are Eric's friends are **hiding him**. They know that he killed Carpenter, but they are **sympathetic** to his story and they want to protect him because they consider him a **honorary goblin**.

They have been **sneaking into the control room** late at night with his keys, and making **modifications** to the control system according to his instructions. They believe that he feels bad about the impact his actions have had on his mentor and the project and wants to help—this is in fact true, and anyone with sufficient skill in engineering will be able to verify that **the modifications are beneficial** rather than destructive.

The goblins have also **gone to Eric's flat** to fetch him some clothes.

If Zzuxsartha picked up the **scent of strange people** (clove cigarettes; coffee) in the **control room** or in **Eric's flat**, she may now recognise some of the goblins. At least one of the goblins is a **compulsive smoker of clove cigarettes**, and will chain-smoke throughout the interview.

The goblins are loyal to their friend and **unlikely to rat him out**, but they may be persuaded to **make some kind of deal** on his behalf if the investigators can guarantee his safety. They are more likely to **arrange a meeting** with him—perhaps **somewhere in the station**, where he has a lot of escape routes—than to tell the investigators where they can find him—but if they discover the goblins' involvement they may be able to guess that he's **staying with one of them**. They are not criminal masterminds, and they couldn't think of a better idea.

## Eric Hill

*Smells like machine oil and whey*

The investigators may persuade Eric's friends to arrange a meeting with him **somewhere in the station**—or they may track him down themselves if they **search his friends' flats**. Eric will not see any point in denying that he killed Lord Carpenter—he will **confess the whole story** and explain what drove him to seek the confrontation. He can **identify the agents** from Smythe, Smythe & Cooper who gave him the information about Carpenter's factory. He agrees that the investigators have him dead to rights, but points out that without him the railway project will almost certainly not be completed on time and requests that they **delay arresting him** until he has been able to finish the control system.

## Eric's home

Eric stays in a rented flat above a **cheese shop**. It is dingy and tiny, very sparsely furnished, and completely at odds with his high salary. A more careful look will reveal that some items of clothing appear to be missing. If the investigators visited the station before the flat, Zzuxsartha may **recognise the scent** of some of the goblin employees (clove cigarettes; coffee). She should also recognise Eric's scent (machine oil and whey).

Eric's ancient **goblin landlady**, Ugrah Ugrahsdottir, knows perfectly well that he is in **some kind of trouble** and that some of his friends came over to get his clothes—but she has no intention of telling this to the police. She will say that she hasn't seen him since the morning of the murder—and

tell them at length what a nice and polite young man he was, and how kind he was to **donate all his money to charity**.

She knows some of Eric's **sad family history**, and the investigators may **coax it out of her** if they reassure her that Eric is not a suspect. She knows that **his mother lost her job** when a factory closed down and that she later **died** and Eric was put in an orphanage. She has no idea who owned the factory—because Eric hadn't either—but if she thinks about it she may remember that **it made screws**.

## Varchessen estate

The Varchessen estate is a **sprawling compound** of buildings. The **architecture** is quintessentially drow—a **timeless elven style** reminiscent of a bygone era of **imperial splendour**. The overwhelming colour scheme is **blue and silver**—the buildings are draped in **silk banners**, and the guards are wearing **matching livery**.

If the investigators ask to see someone in charge, they will be told that **Gaussryne Varchessen** has agreed to see them, and will be **escorted** by two guards to her rooms in the main building.

As they are crossing the estate grounds, they may notice that the estate guards seem to be **preparing for something**. There is **tension** in the air, and the guards are wearing far more **armour** than drow guards on the street normally wear. Servants are **carrying crates** around. Gaussryne is taking Zhaundree's **prediction** seriously, and knows that if the auction does not go well there may be **serious trouble** on the horizon. She isn't sure whether it will be most prudent to fight, wait things out or evacuate—and is determined to be **ready for anything**. **Provisions** have been acquired and packaged, and the guards are on **high alert**.

Gaussryne has told her sister to **stay out of sight** during the audience, but **Zhaundree** is far too impulsive and impatient to listen to her sister, and will probably not be able to contain her **curiosity** if the audience goes on for too long.

## Gaussryne Varchessen

- **Persuasive speaker** (d8)
- **Deadly at close range** (d8)
- **Good shot** (d10)
- **Passable water mage** (d12)

### *Smells like silk and iron*

Gaussryne is a **confident** young drow noblewoman who introduces herself as the **steward** of House Varchessen. She will try to tell the investigators **as little as possible** without actually lying.

If Zzuxsartha picked up **Gaussryne's scent** (silk and iron) in Carpenter's study, she may recognise her now. If asked whether she **visited Carpenter** on the day of the murder, Gaussryne will not deny it. She will say quite truthfully that she had **nothing to do with the murder** and was there to make Lord Carpenter a mutually beneficial **business offer**—one which she had every reason to believe would have been accepted.

If asked whether she had an **interest in the abacus**, Gaussryne will admit that she was attempting to **purchase** the abacus legitimately—as a **gift for her sister**, who had become **obsessed** with it because of its interesting history. She will continue to **downplay** its magical significance, and will of course **deny stealing it**.

If the investigators ask some pointed questions, possibly confronting her with **Zhaundree's letter**, she will very reluctantly admit that the abacus is **dangerous** and should be kept out of untrustworthy hands. If pressed further, she may acknowledge that she would **profit** from possessing the abacus, but will assure the investigators—mostly truthfully—that she intends to use it for **peaceful applications**.

It is possible that Gaussryne will **make a deal** to recover the abacus with the aid of the investigators, if they agree that it will **end up in her possession**. She will offer to **cut House Chathradin in** on any profits if she believes that this is necessary to get Pharolin on her side.

If a deal is made, she will tell the investigators about the **auction**, and arrange for them to **coordinate** their plan of action. She has a small squad of drow **snipers** whom she is planning to take to the auction as **hidden backup**, and possibly try to **ambush** anyone trying to leave the venue with the abacus should she fail to acquire it.

If no deal is made, Gaussryne will **keep quiet** about the auction, and wait for the investigators to go away before continuing to **prepare her team**. If she is asked about the **activity** outside, she will claim that she is concerned that her estate may be **targeted** by whoever is responsible for the theft and murder, and has put all her guards on high alert.

As a **water mage**, Gaussryne can create jets of water and shards of ice to use as weapons—but she prefers to use knives.

## Zhaundree Varchessen

- **Magical visionary** (d8)
- **Unhinged peacemaker** (d12)

### *Smells like old paper and lightning*

Zhaundree is an **eccentric mage**, and is technically the **ilhress** of House Varchessen.

She inhabits a world orthogonal to everyone else's: the world of advanced magic. She experiences **frequent visions** of the past and future, and for months she has been plagued by the knowledge that if she doesn't keep the Jet Abacus out of the hands of power-hungry people the entire **city will be destroyed**.

Zhaundree believes that a lot of unnecessary trouble would be avoided if everyone just **told the truth**, and is frustrated that nobody else thinks this is a good idea. She would like nothing more than to tell the police all about the abacus, but her sister has patiently and repeatedly explained that this would jeopardise their chances of retrieving the abacus and keeping it safe, so she knows that she mustn't.

Gaussryne has tried to keep her away from the police, but she will probably show up anyway sooner or later. She will try to **follow her sister's lead** when it comes to revealing information, but she may accidentally **let something slip**. She won't say anything about the auction in front of Gaussryne, but she might send the investigators **a letter with a tip-off** later, once Gaussryne has gone.

If she is asked about the warning letter, she will admit that she sent it, and be perplexed as to why anyone would think that it was a threat.

## Temple of the Sun

The temple is a **large edifice** built in a **middle-class human neighbourhood**. Here the non-human investigators are likely to attract many **unfriendly stares**—especially in the temple itself.

The most noticeable feature of the temple interior is a **massive gold-plated statue** of the God of the Sun, clad in golden armour, holding a sword in one hand and pointing at something accusingly with the other. He looks angry, and each of the investigators will have the unsettling impression that he is pointing his finger directly at them.

If they ask to speak to someone in charge, the investigators will be shown to a small room and kept waiting for quite a long time. Eventually **Grand Master Charavon** will show up and reluctantly consent to a brief interview.

### Grand Master Charavon

- Consummate **politician** (d10)
- Skilled **fire mage** (d10)

*Smells like ash and vinegar*

Grand Master Charavon **despises** non-humans and infidels, but he didn't get to be Grand Master of the Order of the Sun without learning how to disguise his naked loathing with a **polite smile**. He will truthfully **deny any involvement** in Lord Carpenter's murder or the theft of the abacus—although he may sound **wistful** when he talks about the abacus.

If the inspectors show him the **threatening letter**, he will brush it off as either the work of an **overzealous novice** or an outsider's attempt to **smear the order**. He doesn't actually know who wrote the letter, but he is aware that such letters are written and **turns a blind eye**.

He will complain at length that he and his followers are always made **scapegoats** by the city authorities because **their beliefs are inconvenient**—and suggest that the investigators **look closer to home** for murderers and thieves.

### Zaxtlass' House of Diverse Delights

This is a private yuan-ti-run club with nightly variety shows, which is a front for a high-class brothel and drug den, which is a front for an illicit magic market. The proprietor is Zaxtlass Ssizzith—who is also responsible for the theft of the **Jet Abacus**, which is currently safely stored in the **warded back room** where Zaxtlass plans to have his auction tonight. The establishment is close to the **docks**—Zaxtlass has a subterranean **escape route** which leads to the river.

Alma is likely to have heard of Zaxtlass—in which case she will know that he's **involved in all kinds of dodgy dealings**, but that he has **powerful friends** and has never been caught **with his hands dirty**.

The investigators may come here in their **official capacity** and **identify** themselves as officers of the law, or they may come **incognito**—if they already have a **suspicion** that the auction will be happening here. Regardless of their **initial approach**, it should be entirely possible for one or both of the out-of-town investigators to **persuade** Zaxtlass that they are interested in **buying the abacus** for their own people. He is used to **omnipresent corruption**, and the prospect of making **even more money** will cloud his better judgement. That, after all, is why the auction is happening.

The investigators should quickly see that many patrons inside the club are wearing **silver orchid lapel pins**.

They can potentially talk to **Zaxtlass**, **Isavel**, **Livy** (the “ginger snake-girl”) and possibly some **random thugs** from the Zzussassh family. If they arrive later at night, they can also attempt to infiltrate or raid **the auction** somehow.

### Zaxtlass Ssizzith

- Accomplished **liar** (d8)
- Knows how to work his **greasy charm** (d10)
- A lover, **not a fighter** (d20)
- Excellent **swimmer** (d8)
- Entirely unable to **quit while he's ahead** (d30)

*Smells like saffron and interesting narcotics*

Zaxtlass is a handsome yuan-ti who is **charming** in an oily sort of way. Below the waist, he has the body of a large snake. He can't move very fast on land, but he can swim very fast. He has a prominent family tattoo on his shoulder; Alma, Ugruk and Zzuxsaritha may recognise it as the tattoo of the Ssizzith family of merchants.

He will take it as a given that the investigators are aware of his **reputation**, but will maintain the facade of an **honest businessman**, and attempt to persuade them that none of the **business dealings** in which he is currently involved have **any bearing** on their investigation—which is half-true.

He will very sincerely say that it's **terrible that Lord Carpenter is dead**—he thinks it's terrible because it has drawn the police's attention to his establishment! He is nervous that they will **discover something about the auction**, and will try to **make them happy so that they go away**, or at least keep them distracted and **away from the back room**—unless, of course, some of them have **convinced** him that they want to be **in on the bidding**.

If they ask him about **Isavel** he will tell them that she is a “hostess” at the club, and allow them to interview her, delighted to be able to assist. If he finds out about her inheritance, he will suddenly become very concerned about her welfare and happiness, and offer to “help” her manage her money.

### Isavel

*Smells like rosemary perfume*

Isavel is a pretty young woman. She is **quite sad** over Carpenter's death—she genuinely liked him. She had hopes that someday he would make her his official mistress and take her away from the brothel.

She was Carpenter's **closest confidante**, and may be able to fill in certain details about his **personal life**, such as his estrangement with his daughter and his attitude to various employees at Carpenter & Thargsson.

If the investigators tell her about her inheritance, she will be overwhelmed—and also unsure of what she should do next. The more she thinks about it, the more afraid she will be that someone—like Lady Carpenter—is going to get rid of her.

### Livy

*Smells like smoke and cinnamon*

Livy is a little human girl with yuan-ti blood—she has no yuan-ti family tattoo, and very bushy red hair. The investigators may spot her at the bar, begging beers off the long-suffering bartender. There is a **cat-sized spider** perched on her shoulder. She knows she's not supposed to be seen inside, but it's too late for Zaxtlass to throw her out without causing a scene.

If she is asked about the spider she will say that **it's her pet**, and if she is asked about her visits to the kitchen of the Carpenter estate she will **deny ever being** there at first.

If the investigators press her, she will eventually admit going there to **beg for food**, and defensively assert that she “**never killed anyone**”. Zzuxsartha may **recognise her by scent** (smoke and cinnamon) if she has been in the kitchen. The investigators may also verify that the **spider** is a likely source of the **fine hairs** found in the smoking room.

Livy is not a very happy employee—she doesn’t think that Zaxtlass appreciates her contribution to his elaborate schemes. If it looks like the investigators are onto her and she’s in serious trouble, she will agree to rat out Zaxtlass if they promise to protect her.

### Zzussassh thugs

- Good in **close combat** (d10)
- Average with a **pistol** (d12)

### *Smell like carbon dioxide*

Some **unfriendly-looking snake-headed yuan-ti** in ill-fitting waistcoats are hanging around at the bar. They have subtle family tattoos on the backs of their heads. Alma, Ugruk and Zzuxsartha may recognise them as tattoos of the Zzussassh family—the family is known for its conservative values. Observant investigators may notice that they all have **irregular breathing patterns**, and sometimes seem to **hold their breath** for extended periods of time. Zzuxsartha may smell the **carbon dioxide** which they give off from their bodies as it builds up.

The Zzussassh thugs have been sent to the club early in an attempt to **intimidate Zaxtlass** into **giving up on his auction** and selling them the abacus as previously agreed, by scaring his customers and possibly vaguely threatening to burn the building down.

Neither Zaxtlass nor the Zzussassh want to continue their disagreement over an illegal deal in full view of the police, so they will **behave civilly** towards each other while the investigators are watching. If Zaxtlass is asked about them, he will dismiss them as his **badly-behaved country cousins**.

The thugs are waiting for their boss, **Ssuzztli Zzussassh**, to show up for the **auction**. They are instructed to **hang around** inside the club while he goes into the **back room**—ready to **come to his aid** should he have need of them.

### The auction

The Jet Abacus is currently stored in a **safe** in Zaxtlass’ **back room**. The room is protected by state-of-the-art **custom wards**—as a result, the Guild of Mages has been unsuccessful in trying to track the location of the abacus by magic. The wards will also **prevent magic use** inside the room—a very sensible safety precaution. The floor has a **hidden trapdoor** which is Zaxtlass’ emergency **escape route**—it is a **tunnel** flooded with water and leading to the nearby **river**.

Zaxtlass will politely insist that **only buyers** are permitted inside the room—if they have brought **escorts**, they will have to wait **outside** in the club.

When all interested parties are inside, Zaxtlass will **reveal the abacus** and start the **bidding** with an astronomical sum which was the payment originally offered by the Zzussassh.

The auction will probably start off **civilly**, but the loser is unlikely to **accept defeat** graciously—the winner will probably not make it out of the club without getting **jumped**. It is also possible that gatecrashers will arrive—either because the investigators have organised some kind of **raid**, or because they have **found out** about the auction some other way.

If it looks like the situation is **getting out of hand**, Zaxtlass may decide that discretion is the better part of valour, and try to **make a run for it** by diving down his trapdoor—but if he thinks that he can possibly **salvage** some kind of **profit**, he will probably be tempted to do so.

### Ssuzztli Zzussassh

- **Intimidating** presence (d8)
- Short **temper** (d20)
- Excellent in **close combat** (d8)
- Good with a **pistol** (d10)
- Good venomous **bite** (d10)
- Can **hold his breath** (d10)

### *Smells like carbon dioxide and gunpowder*

Ssuzztli has the **head of a snake**, and speaks with a strong yuan-ti **accent**. He has a **high-pitched voice** which he nevertheless manages to inflect with an air of **quiet menace**.

He will spend the whole auction trying to **intimidate** the other buyers into **backing down**. He will **bluff** about the amount of money he has available—if Zaxtlass asks to **see it** at any point, he will say that he distributed it among **his guards** for safekeeping.

Observant investigators may notice his **irregular breathing**, and that he sometimes seems to **hold his breath** for extended periods of time. Zzuxsartha may smell the **carbon dioxide** which he gives off from his bodies as it builds up. He also smells like **gunpowder**.

### Summary of NPCs at the auction:

#### The hosts

Zaxtlass has some of his own muscle providing security at the auction. These poor bouncers are hopelessly outclassed and will probably be the **first to die** if violence erupts.

- **Zaxtlass Ssizzith**: Accomplished **liar** (d8), Knows how to work his **greasy charm** (d10), A lover, **not a fighter** (d20), Excellent **swimmer** (d8), Entirely unable to **quit while he’s ahead** (d30)
- **Brothel bouncer**: Average in **close combat** (d12), Average with a **pistol** (d12)

#### Zzussassh family

The patriarch, Ssuzztli Zzussassh, has brought a **small group** of hand-picked underlings. He also brought his **little brother** Zzisstlax—a yuan-ti shaped like an **enormous snake**. He’s not very bright, but he can follow instructions and eat anyone who isn’t a relative.

- **Ssuzztli Zzussassh**: **Intimidating** presence (d8), Short **temper** (d20), Excellent in **close combat** (d8), Good with a **pistol** (d10), Good **venomous bite** (d10), Can **hold his breath** (d10)
- **Zzisstlax Zzussassh**: Devastating **tail slap** (d8), Deadly **venomous bite** (d8), **Dumber** than a sackful of hammers (d30), Can **hold his breath** (d10)
- **Zzussassh thug**: Good in **close combat** (d10), Average with a **pistol** (d12)

## House Varchessen

Gaussryne Varchessen has brought a **small escort** of trained drow house guards, who are hanging around **in the club**—as well as some **snipers** concealed by **cloaking magic**, who will take positions around the **outside perimeter**.

- **Gaussryne Varchessen:** **Persuasive speaker** (d8), **Deadly at close range** (d8), **Good shot** (d10), **Passable water mage** (d12)
- **Drow guard:** Excellent in **close combat** (d8), Average with a **pistol** (d12)
- **Drow sniper:** Excellent **sniper** (d8), Average in **close combat** (d12), Magical **cloaking ability** (d10)

## Potential gatecrasher: the Order of the Sun

The head of the order has brought a handful of his most skilled **flame templars**. Zealots are not nature's great planners—they will most probably just run into the club and start **setting things on fire**.

- **Grand Master Charavon:** Consummate **politician** (d10), Skilled **fire mage** (d10)
- **Flame templar:** Skilled **fire mage** (d10)

## Potential gatecrasher: the Guild of Mages

The guild will send **several mages**, but they will **not notify the police**—they don't want to tip their hand to the authorities before they have secured the abacus. If a force from the **constabulary** is also due to arrive because the investigators have organised **their own raid**, there will be a confrontation—the guild will insist on taking custody of the abacus, and may resort to the use of **force** if the constabulary refuses to give it up.

Each of the guild's combat mages has a **magic specialisation in one element**.

- **Marsil Tanner:** Good at **lying for the guild** (d10), Skilled at **air magic** (d8)
- **Guild mage:** Skilled **elemental mage** (d10)

## Conclusion

Just about anything could happen in the chaotic dispute over the abacus. The conflict between the **drow** and the **yuan-ti** should provide enough interesting material for the final scene, but if it is resolved **prematurely** or comes to a **stalemate**, throw in a surprise attack by the **Order of the Sun** or a raid by the **Guild of Mages** if it seems appropriate. Of course the investigators may have arranged a raid of their own.

The ultimate **fate of the city** depends on the hands in which the abacus ends up—but even if one of the less benevolent factions prevails it will be **some time** before the destruction starts, and when the smoke clears Commander Rose will want to hear **some kind of resolution** concerning Lord Carpenter's murder. The investigators have the option of **turning in Eric Hill**—the actual perpetrator—or **framing someone else**.

The investigators have the backing of the council and some important drow and yuan-ti who would like the case to be closed in a satisfactory manner, so they have a fair amount of **political clout**—but it **has its limits**. They can of course accuse anyone they like, but they will need some **compelling**

**evidence** if they want to finger somebody important. Just about anyone **involved in the auction** can potentially be compromised sufficiently that it is possible for them to be arrested, and they all have the same obvious motive: the theft of the abacus. It would be more difficult for the investigators to charge Lady Carpenter and her husband with the crime.