

Detective Alma Ostler

Human woman; 45 years old.

Bitter veteran of the Snakesford Constabulary; private investigator; blackmailed into taking one last case. Chainsmokes a pipe.

You are a tall and wiry middle-aged human woman. You wear your hair in a ponytail to keep it out of your eyes. You are wearing a rumpled man's suit—you tried to make yourself presentable this morning, but you didn't try very hard. As usual, you are smoking a pipe.

Traits

- Average **strength** (d12)
- Below-average **agility** (d20)
- Average **health** (d12)
- Extensive **knowledge of the world** (d8)
- Above-average **perception** (d10)

Skills

- A good **reader of people** (d8)
- **Knows the city** like the back of her hand (d8)
- Knows her way around a **crime scene** (d10)
- Able to **subdue a suspect** (d10)
- Has a pistol, and **knows how to use it** (d12)
- Enjoys **playing the harmonica** (d12)
- Too honest to be very **diplomatic** (d20)

Important equipment

- A Wilbert & Odricsson concealable **pistol**
- A **pipe**, an envelope of tobacco, and matches
- A **harmonica**

Background

You know Snakesford like the back of your hand—every neighbourhood is a familiar face, and every street has its distinct personality. Twenty years ago you would have said that you loved this city—but your years of service to the constabulary cured you of your youthful infatuation. This city has broken your heart.

The rot started slowly. Although you were one of the best detectives on the force, and your record of solved cases put most of your colleagues to shame, you could always see that a hidden world existed above your own world. A world where the stakes were unimaginably high, and where fraud and murder were committed with the stroke of a pen and the exchange of coins. You knew that nothing you did could ever touch this world—its inhabitants were protected by their wealth and power, and their crimes would never be brought to the door of the constabulary. You tried to ignore this world, and be content with the righting of petty, everyday wrongs—but every year you had to try harder. Too many times you saw an easy scapegoat being put away for a crime because digging deeper would have produced an answer nobody wanted

to hear. Too often a trail went cold because a councillor whispered in the Commissioner's ear that someone was looking in an inconvenient place.

One day, you were sent to investigate the murder of a minor merchant, who had apparently surprised some robbers in his dockside manor. It didn't take you long to notice the suspicious behaviour of one of the servants, and the poor girl folded as soon as you took her aside for questioning. She had been bribed and threatened to let the thugs in at a time when her master was at home. This was clearly a deliberate assassination, and you easily traced it to a competing city merchant—one whose influence put him far outside your reach. You knew that you could not bring the real perpetrator of the crime to justice, and you knew that the girl would be hanged as an accomplice if you even tried to take the matter further—so you did the only thing that your conscience permitted: you destroyed your notes and claimed to have found no leads. You resigned from the service a week later.

As a private detective, you had the luxury of choosing your cases—and recourses other than the law when you needed to see justice done. You sometimes let little crimes slide if it meant you could catch a bigger fish. But although you learned that powerful people had powerful enemies, and that sometimes even the most powerful could be made to pay for their actions, you avoided getting tangled up in politics whenever you could. The hidden world has teeth, and you know very well that you can't stand against it alone.

Lord Carpenter's death has shaken the city. The press has been screaming about a supposed curse for days, but word on the street is that this all has something to do with the construction of the station—and the impending visit of two foreign heads of state.

The murder sounded far too political for your liking, and you were trying very hard not to take an interest. You were not very pleased when two uniformed constables appeared in your office this morning and delivered an invitation which you could not refuse: a meeting with your old boss, Commander Rose. You had a conversation which neither of you pretended was friendly: you were to return to active duty immediately and begin work on the Carpenter case, and if you refused he would have you prosecuted for destroying evidence and aiding the escape of a murder suspect. It wasn't much of a choice.

Now you have an over-eager goblin rookie following you around, and the drow and the yuan-ti have sent their own people to work with you—this murder must really be a big deal.

It sounds like the powers that be actually want the truth, and not just a quick frame-up of some poor street urchin—they wouldn't need you for that. If you were to catch some nob dead to rights with the abacus in one hand and a brick in the other, you might actually be able to put one of these bastards away, just this once.

Your fellow investigators

Pharolin Orvresslar: a drider. You'd think that the drow would have sent someone less conspicuous. He's wearing armour that looks like it came from the dark ages, and is carrying enough weaponry to equip a whole squad. Perhaps if you wanted to chase down some horse thieves he'd be your man, but you don't know what use he's going to be in an urban investigation. You have tried speaking to him, but he's been rather standoffish—although he has treated you with a bizarre degree of deference.

Zzuxsartha Ssestl: apart from the eyes and the tongue, she looks almost human. She's been sold to you as some kind

of specially engineered investigation specialist, but you don't see it. She's barely out of her teens, and she really doesn't look like she's playing with a full deck. She seems fascinated by everyday objects, and you've seen her licking the floor while nobody was looking! If this is the best the yuan-ti can produce these days, you are concerned for the future of their civilisation.

Special Constable Ugruk Grathnarsson: a wet-behind-the-ears goblin rookie who keeps asking you about your old cases. It looks like you've found a fan. He's not actually a normal policeman; he is employed by the constabulary as an engineering consultant. This case may involve some kind of industrial sabotage, and apparently he knows everything there is to know about machines.

Yuan-ti name pronunciation guide

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

Zzizzizth *zizz-izth*