

The Old World from A - Z

A is for Agitator:

Let's start at the beginning of the book, with the first career. I'm certain many people have glossed over this career and settled in for something more immediately gratifying, such as the Troll Slayer perhaps?

Nonetheless this career is one of those wonderful careers whose very presence in the rulebook invokes a feeling of the Old World. By examining this career more closely it may be apparent that role playing this career can be as satisfying as any of the other careers in the book.

Why an Agitator?

Why would anyone choose to be an agitator as their calling in life. Its important to note that people may not necessarily choose their careers in the Old World, sometimes their careers choose them instead. So you've rolled 03 on the Rogue Table and you were hoping for that Footpad career. Let's look at what kind of traits would attract people to this sort of profession, their motivation for pursuing this profession for at least some phase of their life. The following are by no means an exhaustive list, but merely a few ideas to get you thinking of other motivations.



Attention

Some people in life simply want the attention of others. Maybe they were neglected by their mother or father, or were the middle child of three. Regardless of the possible psychobabble explanation, the fact is some people crave being the centre of attention, simply like to be heard and seen by others. Granted, there are many other careers that will fulfil this craving, but this career allows the potential rabble-rouser to feel as if they have some credible reason for standing on street corners and accosting passers by and clamouring for social change.

Axe to Grind

When your bitter and penniless and all you have is your voice, you'll be surprised at how effective a tool, or weapon, it can be. Is your family impoverished by suspected shady dealings of a merchant? - crow to the world about the injustices. Family forced off their tenant farmland by a noble? - advocate for the violent uprising of the poor against the nobles. A person with an axe to grind has some perceived injustice in their past and use their role as an agitator to right the suspected wrong. However should they ever achieve their goal, many eventually tire of agitating and seek out some other goal in life. Others become inured to a life of outrage and discover other causes to champion.

Busy Bodies

There are always those who can never leave well enough alone. Petty, controlling, demanding: these are the traits of a busy body and ideal for those who become agitators. These sorts of agitators are motivated by their need to interfere in everyone's life and tell them how they should live. Their desire is not necessarily driven by the belief that they are particularly right, but by the belief that others simply wouldn't be able to function without them. Some of the bigots are outspoken and constantly promote the incarceration of those with humble mental faculties, asserting of new laws on female behaviour, or the exile of all non humans (and Bretonnians) from the Empire. It is possible for a brave agitator to speak out on the bigotry of others.

Betterment

It is said that a if you can change society for the better, all will benefit. It is a worthy cause to better the lives of others, usually advocating for changes in the internal structure of local society. Tasks like reducing tax burdens, construction of new wells or aqueducts, employment of rat catchers, repairing of roads and buildings, new legislation for civic upkeep, and new policies to deal with crime.

Class Issues

There is little doubt that the Old World has a class society - there are the people of rule, the people of books, the people of faith, the people of trade, and the people of labour. Sadly the lot of some are better than the lot of others and there is considerable resentment particularly between the poor and the rich. Those who speak out on these issues tend to do so in a volatile manner and this is one of the most dangerous issues to speak out on.

Enfranchisement

In a few parts of the Old World the power resides not in the nobility but in local associations of professionals entitled to vote for their members to represent them. Not everyone is entitled to vote however; this right to vote is exclusive to a small select group, usually members of guilds or prominent merchant houses. Countless others are denied the right to play a part in this electoral process. Those guilds denied the right to vote and those merchant families outside this consortium often agitate to be allowed in. It is not unknown for some even more radical agitators to argue for the enfranchisement of all property owners, and some extremists call for the right of every adult male to vote. Cynics claim that the next step is for some lunatic to argue that women, children, and dogs should deserve to be enfranchised!

Ethnic Strife

Some agitators will seek to improve relations between peoples, others take advantage of existing tensions. There are a number of associations in the Old World who have a mission of promoting understanding between peoples and they often educate the public as to the contributions of those that they represent. On the other hand others seek to capitalize on difference and long simmering resentments as a means of scapegoating others or spreading their own virulent brand of racism or bigotry.

Popular Causes

Whether a deficiency in character, a need to remain topical, or a lack of conviction for greater issues, some agitators immerse themselves in only the most popular causes likely to guarantee an audience. These popular causes are short term temporary issues that capture the public's imagination and usually involve some sort of crime or gossip. Agitators will seize upon these things to fund raise or try and propel themselves to the limelight or a position of power. These agitators rarely argue for any real change, but merely ride the crest of public opinion. These issues can be the capture or execution of a feared murderer, the removal of a hated official, the prosecution of overly aggressive watchmen, or the public pillowing of public figures suspected of doing wrong. These opportunists are often the ones most responsible for Agitators giving agitators a bad name.

Religious Advocacy

The various Old World cults often compete in a low profile manner to acquire the attention of a notoriously fickle public. This means that cults sometimes send out contingents of priests and laypersons into the streets to spread the word of their faith and collect donations. The use of public assemblies is not the domain of established cults, many small cults and sub-sects bordering on the realm of heresy often take to the streets to spread the word of their faith - or to decry the legitimacy of the established religions.

Revolution

In change there can be opportunity for advancement, and while many have some vested interest in the status quo there are others who would profit from it changing, or ending. Inciting revolt or revolution is a dangerous proposition at best for the authorities react with extreme prejudice to those threatening their hold on power.

Temperance

Life in the Old World is difficult, and for many a pint or four does much to ease their suffering. Nonetheless there are always those who cannot abide the thought of others enjoying themselves and hence agitate for the abolishment of all strong spirits and liquors. These teetotalers are usually fringe religious types or the uptight sort that favour discipline. Their argument that alcohol causes more problems than it solves is of course no relevance.

Agitators' Roles in Society

Agitators are often a thorn in the side of authorities and a public nuisance to any within hearing range. They do however fulfil a number of valuable roles to society.

First and foremost they are often one of the best sources of information in a town or village. Although this

information is always politicised and never impartial, most people in the streets would never even be made aware of the issues that the agitators represent.

An agitator arguing only dry facts is heard by none, and for this reason agitators are also a source of entertainment and gossip. Agitators are constantly seeking better ways to convey their information and earn the attention of the public and many have mastered the art of public speaking and are able within a few words to seize the attention of the long jaded public. Even if people are not interested in the issue that the agitator is campaigning for, many will stand around and listen for the sake of distraction. Popular agitators have no problem attracting an audience regardless of the subject matter.

Most Old Worlders rarely hear multiple perspectives of an issue, and the agitator is a voice for popular dissent or resistance. The agitator may educate the public in alternatives and suggest ideas that they had not thought possible. The agitator can inspire social change and give voice to people with none.

The establishment can be just as savvy in maintaining control, and they too often have their own advocates arguing for a conservative social approach. These agitators for the status quo serve as a source of political control. Many civic groups and nobles have no shortage of those seeking their favour and are eager to speak up for their masters.

It would be folly to assume that agitators are concerned only with weighty matters pertaining to the health of the body politic. There are those who are concerned not with political issues, but with issues of personal politics. In other words, these people are little more than gossips and slanderers. Other agitators hold these gossips in contempt, the public however is eager to listen to every salacious tidbit.

In a world where not everyone reads, the agitator serves important roles in society, for they provide a forum for public discourse on a whole range of issues that concern or interest the average citizen.

Its a Living

How does an agitator make ends meet? A few are independently wealthy and can afford to whittle away their days ranting in town squares. Another handful care nothing for bourgeois notions like money and live contentedly on the streets. Most need to find a way to fund their agitation. Some rely upon a trade they picked up earlier in life and their free time is spent on corners and courtyards espousing their cause. The very act of agitating can often be a source of income - many agitators will sell their pamphlets or broadsheets developing their arguments and if their cause is popular enough they can earn a tidy profit. The most popular and urgent of causes allow the agitator to directly raise money for their cause, which inevitably results in other agitators taking up the same cause and competing for public donations. One of the best means of making a living is to have a patron that provides for the agitator, however the problem is that the agitator has less autonomy.

Who Would Become An Agitator?

We've already covered those who found themselves taking up a cause for various reasons early in life, but what about those who later in life forsake their vocation to take up agitating?

Exciseman

Why would a tax man take up agitating? There are a number of reasons, but one of the biggest reasons is to serve as a shill for their patron. The authorities are not above paying people to counter-agitate and to voice their perspective on the streets. The problem is that most people recognize these hired advocates and pay them little heed - and a former collector of taxes is very unlikely to win any admiration from others. In towns that are politically contested with fierce politicking for the reigns of power, these exciseman-agitators play an important role in gaining the support of the public.

On the other hand a disgruntled exciseman discharged from his duties for legitimate or spurious reasons may very well take up a cause against their former employees. Likewise so would exciseman removed from their position after their patrons are forced out of power in a town, with their position being filled by the henchman of the usurpers. These former-exciseman are likely to rail publicly against any perceived misstep by the new administration.

It is possible, but somewhat highly unlikely that an exciseman, bothered by his or her own contribution to the inequitable distribution of wealth may switch sides and advocate for fairness and moderation in issues of taxation.

Initiate

Agitation is not merely a political activity, for politics and religion are closely intertwined. Many cults have sub-sects that take a serious role in proselytising and preaching to the public in an effort to heighten public awareness of the cult while others aggressively court converts. Some of these sub-sects are officially sanctioned while others are fringe elements and an embarrassment to the cult.

In areas where religious resentment runs high, such as in some areas of the Empire between Ulric and Sigmar the role of initiates as agitators is an important and volatile one with public opinion easily swayed by hearsay and speculation. This religious war is one fought on street corners, soap boxes, and in pamphlets.

Some initiate may become disillusioned and speak out against their former religious instruction. These agitators may be crazed and bordering on the heretical while others may have very genuine grievances against their former faith or its leadership.

Seer

Sometimes seeing the future is not enough - sometimes spreading your knowledge is just as important. Those seers who believe they witness something significant are often compelled to spread their revelation to all that will listen. Sometimes these seer agitators are mistaken for ranting madmen.

Servant

Who would know better about the inequitable distribution of wealth than those poor who labour in the homes, town houses, and mansions of the rich? Years of drudgery and domineering behaviour by the wealthy has often driven many servants out into the streets to agitate against the excesses of their employers. However there are those servants who are eloquent and charismatic who are employed by their masters to advertise the generosity of their lords or represent their issues in the public forum.

Student

It should come as no surprise that numerous students from colleges and universities have taken up lives as agitators. Some are motivated by a new found idealism, others motivated by guilt, some by long held convictions, and others are out to anger their parents and their tutors. Despite their efforts to get in touch with the commoners, many look at their fervour as the product of a life of leisure and idealistic theory and are distrustful of student agitators.

Moving on...

Charlatan

Those motivated by their own cunning and endowed with a certain contempt of the public often resort to confidence games and scams to make their living. Those that do so are often greedy or have become disillusioned. Their previous profession of agitating often gives them the experience and confidence to become excellent charlatans. Many use agitation as cover for their scams, using popular causes as a means of gaining funds.

Demagogue

Agitators seek to represent a cause, yet those who are truly successful become champions for their cause and sometimes icons for their movement. Demagogues are masters of public opinion and their oratories are capable of convincing even their sceptics. The demagogue is truly a leader who holds his or her position by sheer force of personality. Nearly all agitators long for the power and authority that demagogues wield.

Outlaw

Speaking your mind can be a dangerous proposition in the Old World. People with opinions, or ideas, make enemies. People who speak out publicly about these things often end up dead. Countless agitators have been sought out by authorities or forced into exile and end up as outlaws. In some cases they bring their idealism with them into their new profession, for others they abandon their idealism when confronted by the hardships of a life of banditry.

Adventure Seeds

All too often the adventures in WFRP rarely revolve around the livelihood of the PCs. The following are adventure seeds that involve PC agitators.

A Stack of Pamphlets

The players befriend a printer or possibly a popular agitator. After some time during their friendship they are asked to deliver a stack of handbills to an address because their friend is distracted or incapacitated. A cursory glance at them reveals they discuss some of the overindulgence of a powerful local family. Reading it in more detail reveals some scandalous details and a ringing condemnation of the family, all divulged in a very entertaining and satirical manner.

As they near the point to drop them off they are accosted by Watchmen. The watchmen seem to be looking for something in particular and quickly find the handbills. Once the handbills are discovered the tensions increase and the watchmen become increasingly hostile. They threaten to take the characters in for slander, sedition, or even treason and demand to know their role in this movement. The players can be taken into questioning and even brought to trial depending on how badly they botch their interaction.

Have Them Silenced!

The Agitator PC has, true to form, made some powerful or angry enemy. If protesting about crime, the local crime lord is harbouring resentment. If the player was protesting about politics, they have made a political enemy. Either way their enemy has no sense of humour and has decided to have the agitator done away with. The character is hunted down by a hired killer and the player must uncover who their enemy is and do find some way of defeating their foe before they themselves fall victim to the assassin's blade.

Hunted!

The Agitator PC has recently done something to earn the enmity of the powers that be. The authorities aren't necessarily picky, they may mistake the PC Agitator for another one. Regardless the Agitator is sought out and word has it that they are wanted for an absurd number of charges. Maybe a bomb recently went off or a shot was fired at a person of some import. The PC agitator is sought out as are the rest of their revolutionary party cell. The manhunt is on and the players must escape from town and go underground where they meet some of the town's more colourful and/or dangerous characters.

Riot!

The PC Agitator is busy delivering their speech when the crowd, angry about some recent outrage that the player is unaware of, takes the speech to heart. Before the player knows it the crowd is enthusiastically taking up his or her cause. Unless the player takes desperate measures the crowd begins to run riot and things get out of control.

The Mob!

The PC agitator is prattling on about a cause when things turn sour. Maybe the player touches a sore nerve, or speaks on unpopular matters. Things turn ugly and the player is in danger of being beaten or even lynched by a mob. The player had better either rely upon his or her feet for a quick retreat or upon their oratorical skills to save them.

War of Words

The Agitator is arguing for a cause when a slightly more aggressive or popular agitator is arguing for the opposite cause. First the PC agitator is heckled, but before long toughs are pushing the player around, knocking pamphlets into the dirt while nearby the other agitator is attacking the player's intelligence or character. Soon the PC is engaged in a war of words and personalities and only one can reign supreme.

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