

The Old World A to Zed: C is for Coachman

Why a Be a Coachman?

Money. Plain and simple, the primary reason for being a coachman is the money that one makes. Coachman are hired on by regular coaching companies and their work is steady and stable and there are other opportunities on the side to make money. For those who own their own coach it provides an opportunity to work solely for themselves, although these self-employed coachmen are relatively rare. Lastly, there are those who drive the private coaches of nobilities and the social elite and for them the job is usually one of ease and luxury.



The other significant reason for following this profession is the travel. In the Old World most people are confined to a certain region around their farms with little opportunity to travel further. Coachmen on the other hand are able to travel about, and while many of them work the same routes day in and day out many others cover routes whose coachmen have fallen sick or unable to work. Over time, a coachmen meets numerous people, experiences interesting encounters, and enjoys a bit more of the world than the average Old Worlder.

While individual Coachmen may have their own reasons for following the career, many of them benefit from their roles in “Teamster’s Guilds” in which they are members of a close-knit community that offers it member social and financial support. Upon retirement many receive a pension to supplement their savings.

Coachmen’s Roles in Society

The Coachmen (and their companions, Muleskinners) play a critical role in society, ferrying about passengers, cargo, and information and ensuring that the cultural infrastructure of society functions smoothly. Every day, hundreds of coaches wind their way through the Old World’s roads and highways bearing people, small goods, and news about the world. It is possible, in theory, to take coaches all the way from the tip of Estalia to Kislev, so pervasive is the road network of the Old World. It should be noted that avalanches, floods, collapsed bridges, surly coachmen, highway banditry, murderous attacks, fallen trees, and freak events make such a trip far less likely in practice.

In general, coachmen have a responsibility to get their coach, its occupants and any cargo to their destination. Some serve only a nobleman, others work for companies and thus take on all manner of clientele, and it is primarily the transport of passengers

that is their duty, but space on top of or at the back of the coach is often used to haul small loads of merchandise and goods and the coachmen themselves have long carried the mail for which they are given payment to deliver by the sender.

Part of their assignment is the defense of the coach and its passengers and they are expected to resist any attempt at theft, kidnapping, or murder. Few coachmen though are willing to put their lives on the line and a few even have come to an “understanding” with bandits and the like.

Its a Living

Those coachmen with some of the easiest lifestyles are those that work for nobility and the wealthy. They are usually outfitted with a livery with the noble’s or merchant family’s colors and coat of arms or seal. They are usually given a place to stay in the coach house or in the stables and given authority over the stable hands and coach hands. With room and board provided for, a Coachman can expect anywhere from a schilling per day to ten a day for those serving high nobility.

For those who work for Coach Lines they are not paid by the week but by the trip. Usually part of a guild, they are able to negotiate rates and due to the expense of the trip and possible dangers the Coachmen is paid per route they travel. Some routes are more profitable than others. At the high end, routes may average out to a couple of gold per day on the best and busiest routes while in other areas it may be lower than 10/- on the least profitable of routes. Work is however seasonable, periods of bad weather may keep a coachman from working for months, banditry may close some routes down. Thus a portion of the Coachman’s earnings are surrendered in guild fees while another portion is set aside for those period where there may be little work.

While working, the coach line that they work for owns the coaching inn that they stay at or has made arrangements with the inn. Thus while traveling the coachmen need not pay for basic room and board, although any alcohol is frowned upon and needs to be paid for by the coachmen.

When not working directly on routes many Coachmen spend their time working at coaching inns loading and unloading other coaches, collecting coach fares, and maintaining the coaches themselves. Coaches tend to have two coachmen so that they can change shifts when tired, to keep each other alert, to avoid danger, and in the case of repairs they can work together.

Coachmen who work find other ways of supplementing their income. Some are given tips by passengers, although this is exceedingly rare. Many coachmen carry the mail, carrying bags of letters or parcels from one coaching inn to the next in return for a few pennies, and in this manner most of the mail moves about the Old World through a series of coaching trips. Coaching lines have stepped in and started charging for mail so that slowly coachmen are losing this source of income.

A handful take up smuggling of goods in their coaches to avoid taxes or to traffic in forbidden goods and such trade is quite profitable. While this is illegal, coaches are rarely stopped and searched and thus it is quite a lucrative trade for many coaching lines.

Most coachmen consider themselves professionals, but few a handful are quite crooked and have aligned themselves with local outlaws or highwaymen. Coachmen have been known on occasion to tip off bandits in an area as to a profitably highway robbery to perform and the coachmen who acted as informant is later given some of the proceeds from the crime.

Who Would Become A Coachman?

Those who become coachmen are fortunate – because of the guild structure of the coachmen many are simply born into the right family – a family of coachmen. The labor pool is comprised almost entirely of those who come from families where another member is a coachmen, thus the defining factor of a coachmen is that fortune smiled upon them on account of which family they were born in.

For those outsiders fortunate enough to find a way into the trade, there is little in common for they come from all parts of the lower and middle classes. Some who enter the trade are former mercenaries or muleskinners, others laborers or other travelers who were able to convince a guild to hire them.

Moving On...

Despite the benefits of the job, being a coachmen can be a taxing job. There are long journeys, time spent away from friends and family, tedious hours of sitting and driving, or waiting around for the weather to clear for travel, and of course the dangers of the trip, many coachmen have been stopped and robbed, some even killed. Others are subject to random acts of violence from the bloodthirsty inhabitants of the forest.

Some leaven the trade out of fear of these things. For others, the life of a coachmen doesn't offer enough adventure! Some want to see more of the world, hear more stories, maybe even one day have stories of themselves told in a tavern late at night.

As noted earlier, their travels along the road and stops at inns they often encounter the seedier elements of highway travel, including bandits and highwaymen and sometimes the groups collude together. In fact the coachmen's knowledge of roads, schedules, and coach lines often tempts one to become a highwayman him or herself.

On the other hand, their knowledge of roads and routes often allows them to sell their services as a guide or scout, an option favored by those who like independence or more travel. As such many of the scouts who travel the fringes of society first got their start traveling the better known regions of the Old World as coachmen.

Adventure Seeds

Coach Wars

Coach routes are valuable and the most profitable are fought over. Many coaches compete along the same routes, while others own monopolies over certain routes. Thus the economics of the coach trade are also tied up in politics. Should a coach line fail to fulfill its charter and obligations to provide services due to robbery or other acts of violence. Thus coach lines have been known to battle politically and even criminally to destroy rivals.

When tensions or competition rises between coach lines and people's livelihoods are at risk, there is the danger of rival coach lines warring with each other. It can take subtle means, such as a war of gossip, rumor, or innuendo. It can result in sabotage of coaches or the laming of horse teams. It may even escalate into outright violence, barroom brawls, acts of intimidation, arson, and the hiring of mercenaries to rob rival coach lines.

For Coachmen PCs this can be extended into an entire campaign, but for most other PCs they are apt to encounter this while taking a coach and become embroiled in the intrigues of coach houses and guilds.

Highwayman

A Coach grinds to a halt, a fallen tree blocks the road and a masked figure sits mounted ahead, pistols aimed at the coachmen. Resistance to the robbery is non-existent. The coachmen throw aside the blunderbuss and the highwayman orders the occupants out. Is violence likely? Is there a story behind this highwayman? Does the highwaymen have colleagues awaiting in the woods? Are the coachmen secretly involved?

Missing Letter

A coachmen receives an important letter, places it within his jerkin and then the coach is off. At the next inn, he is found dead the next morning and the letter missing. Only the people riding the coach saw him receive the letter, and clearly what the letter contains is important and the murderer, one or the passengers on the coach must be responsible! What was in the letter, and why was a man murdered for it?

Smuggling

The imposition of a tax makes a product more expensive, and merchants hate to see their profits reduced. Thus a coach line has taken up smuggling on behalf of a merchant. The merchant's actions however have earned him the ire of those who feel they have a right to exclusively smuggle goods into the town or city: the local crime family of smugglers who have a violent reaction to the crime. Before the players know it, hooded figures seem to have taken an interest in the coach they are riding in...

Alternately an unsuspecting coachmen is convinced to carry a little pipe weed inside the player's baggage. The problem is that concealed in the pipe weed are illegal magical ingredients. Unfortunately in a crackdown on tax evasion the local authorities have decided to stiffen their searches of coaches and carriages.

A Very Important Passenger

A night racked by thunderstorms. A well-dressed lady, covered in a non-descript cloak. A surly bodyguard. A bag of gold, too much money to refuse. A midnight departure. All components of a mystery.

Perhaps the characters are coachmen: who is their mysterious passenger? Where is she going? Or from what is she fleeing? And what dangers will this ill-advised but potentially profitable journey bring?

Perhaps the players are witnesses to the departure. Hours later the coach is discovered tipped over, all the occupants except the lady dead, and the lady herself missing.

-Rev. Lepper