

Welcome to the Turb: Tostig of Winchelsea

By Mark Lawford

This is the first in an occasional series of grogs exclusive to the Sub Rosa web site. Welcome to the Turb does for grogs what the Companion Piece series does for companion characters; each installment provides a fully-defined grog character that you can pick up and play as part of your growing turb. And of course, the beauty of grogs is that they can be pretty well introduced on the fly with little introduction.

In this installment we meet Tostig of Winchelsea, a loyal and seemingly unaging grog who has served two generations of Verditius magi. Those

reading *The Journal of Vulcanis Argens* currently being published in Sub Rosa may recognize the name. But either way, here is a no-nonsense turb sergeant that will keep grogs and magi alike in line.

Background

Some say that Tostig comes from a lost line of Saxon kings. Others that he was the illegitimate offspring of a Scandinavian trader and a dockside hussy. Either could be right as nothing is actually known of his origins. His story started when Edsel of Winchelsea, apparently Tostig's

father, brought him to the covenant as a very young child. Tostig has no memory of his mother, doesn't know what happened to her, or why she wasn't with them when they arrived. In any case, only a week later Edsel himself disappeared leaving Tostig in the care of the covenant. It was so long ago now and Tostig has gotten so old that it's all ancient history to him. He hasn't wondered about Edsel or his mother at all in the last thirty years.

He was always a robust youth and

Tostig of Winchelsea

Characteristics: Int 0, Per 0, Pre +1, Com 0, Str +2, Sta +2, Dex 0, Qik 0

Size: 0

Age: 70 (55)

Decrepitude: 2 (25)

Warping Score: 5 (5)

Virtues and Flaws: Custos; Lesser Immunity (Arrows), Unaging, Warrior; Arthritis, Disfigured (Scaled skin), Fragile Constitution, Offensive to Animals, Weakness (talking back to magi)

Personality Traits: Loyal +3, Brave +2, Sympathetic -1

Combat:

Dodge: Init -2, Attack N/A, Defense +7, Damage N/A

Fist: Init -2, Attack +6, Defense +6, Damage +2

Axe & Round Shield: Init -1, Attack +13, Defense +11, Damage +8

Great Axe: Init -1, Attack +12, Defense +6, Damage +12

Throwing Axe: Init -1, Attack +8, Defense +6, Damage +8

Soak: +11 (including +2 for quality armor)

Fatigue Levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Wound Penalties: -1 (1-5), -3 (6-10), -5 (11-15), Incapacitated (16-20)

Abilities: Area Lore: Tribunal 3 (monsters), Area Lore: Region 4 (monsters), Awareness 3 (in combat), Brawl 6 (Dodge), Carouse 3 (with fighting friends), Charm 2 (being witty), Chirurgy 4 (binding wounds), Concentration 2 (night watch), Covenant Lore 4 (history), English 5 (slang), Faerie Lore 3 (specific types of faeries), Finesse 2 (using devices), Folk Ken 3 (magi), Great Weapon 5 (Great Axe), Guile 2 (getting extra rations), Latin 3 (hermetic usage), Leadership 5 (in combat), Magic Lore 3 (creatures), Order of Hermes Lore 3 (grogs), Single Weapon 8 (Axe), Survival 3 (when in a group), Swim 3 (long distances), Teaching 4 (Leadership), Thrown Weapon 5 (Axe, Throwing)

Equipment: Pack, heater shield, full metal scale armor (Soak: 11 +2 quality), hand axe, two throwing axes, and on occasion a great axe.

Encumbrance: 2 (4)

Appearance: Tostig is a robust man standing five feet and eight inches tall, broad-chested, with large sturdy arms for a man of his age. His short-cropped hair is grey-turning-white, and his thick beard still has traces of its former brown. Without his metal scale armor, the long years of punishment are apparent in the scars and healed wounds that cover his body.

The years spent in the covenant aura have affected Tostig in another way. There is a patch of scaly skin that runs from Tostig's head under his hair, down his back and across his shoulders. It's easy enough to cover up now, and he has tried to hide it, but it itches in the heat and it is spreading. It won't be long before other people start to notice.

Sub Rosa Magazine

given to scrapping with the other lads and it was clear that he was made to wield weapons rather than a craftsman's tools. So Cretian the turb captain, a man of Normandy by birth, took him under his wing and taught him discipline and how to wield Tostig's favored weapon; the axe. He put his wilder days behind him and joined the turb, quickly making his mark by protecting an unconscious magus from three faerie wolves keen to make the magus pay for some slight or offense against them. Standing over the fallen magus, Tostig slew two of the wolves and, despite being grievously wounded himself, sliced the tip of an ear from the third before it fled. From that day on, he was charged with acting as the magus' personal shield grog. He protected him for fifteen years before the old master passed away. With his apprentice having left the covenant he found himself at a loose end for some time. The other magi did not like his direct manner with them and so he remained in the covenant, organizing the watch under the turb captain. When the apprentice, now a magus in his own right, returned to the covenant, Tostig gained a new lease on life and resumed his position as shield grog with much pride.

His role as Custos of the covenant saw him rise to turb sergeant, a position he has held for the last forty years and he sees it as his duty to bring his lads on, teach them the same lessons of discipline and respect that Cretian taught him. He's served the covenant well over his long years and he feels he can go on forever. Despite urging from the other grogs he refuses to give up his position of sergeant and take his remaining years easy.

He never married and has no children, but the older magi of the covenant remember that he had a



sweetheart once, a long time ago, but that she left the covenant to start a new life with another man elsewhere.

Unaging

For whatever reason, Tostig continues to show few signs of age. Outwardly, his hair has grown grey, his face has become lined, but his body retains its youthful strength and vigor and he still has the constitution of an ox. In game terms, this is down to the Unaging Virtue (ArM5, page 50). But Tostig claims his longevity is due to drinking only moderately, brisk walking, and listening to his elders and betters, three virtues that he extols to the men in his charge.

He has not completely escaped the ravages of age however. His joints are becoming arthritic and it now takes him longer to recover from wounds and illness, both conditions covered by the Arthritis and Fragile Constitution Flaws.

A magus once tried to investigate his unnatural longevity some years ago, but after a week Tostig reminded him in no uncertain terms that he was a turb sergeant and not some rat or bunch of herbs to be pawed at for the benefit of some book or other.

Warping

Nobody quite knows when it

happened, but Tostig has gained a marked resistance to wounds inflicted by arrows. Any that pierce his considerable armor stick into his flesh, but the wounds hardly bleed at all, seem to cause no impediment, and once removed they close completely within a day or two. The magi of the covenant suspect that years of having had variants of Endurance of the Berserkers and Gift of Bear's Fortitude cast upon him may be responsible. In game terms this is modeled by the Lesser Immunity (Arrows) Supernatural Virtue gained when Tostig reached a Warping Score of 5.

Prior to this, he gained the Offensive to Animals and Disfigured Flaws through warping, with a growing patch of scaled skin across his shoulders and back as the disfigurement.

Standing over the fallen magus, Tostig slew two of the wolves and, despite being grievously wounded himself, sliced the tip of an ear from the third before it fled.

Playing Tostig

Grogs are generally treated as troupe characters, which means everybody gets the chance to pick them up and play them and Tostig should be no different. So what are the key features that set him apart from the other grogs?

He's old enough to be your grandfather but can still bring on the hurt. As a result, he calls pretty much everyone "lad". In fact, if there is anyone he doesn't call "lad", then even magi would do well to show them respect.

He's given his life to the covenant, which means he knows how things work. He knows how the covenant works, he knows how the role of the grog works, he knows how the role of the *magus* works, and he knows that the outside world is afraid of what it doesn't understand.

He never undermines a magus in front of the men, but he does pull them aside to give them the benefit of his wisdom. And in no uncertain terms. He knows that his men would lay down their lives for the magi, so he wants to keep the magi in line just as much as he does his own men.

He is a grog through and through and knows his status. As such, he has consistently refused enchanted arms and armor, though he has been trained in their use. He sees enchantment as above his station. He

also understands the nature of magic and its eventual warping effect on the body and mind. But he sees that as just part of the job, like the dust the miller breathes all day, or the burns picked up by the blacksmith.

Important Scenes

Grogs don't generally get stories told about them but every now and then it's nice to find little scenes that let the grogs shine.

The Camp Fire

As turb sergeant, it is Tostig that barks orders at the men to get the

tent put up, to collect firewood and make sure it's dry, to get the food cooking, and to set the order of watch. He's done this a thousand times and his voice should be one of the background sounds when magi take to the road.

Tostig always takes first watch, but he always rises early to ensure that his magus is awake to cast his Parma Magica. If your saga requires players to confirm that they are casting their Parma Magica about them, taking Tostig should negate that requirement as he'll ensure that they do. As a result, he's usually the first face that traveling magi see in the morning, gently prompting them wake.

On the trail of some kind of beast, the players have made Faerie Lore or Magic Lore rolls to see what they know of the creature and its nature. Tostig has been around and while he may not have read bestiaries, or journals, or letters from other magi describing the beasts they've encountered, he has seen and heard much. He usually has a story to tell about the beasts of the night and the creatures of nightmares. And it is Tostig that most turn to when they want a good ghost story around the campfire.

A Matter of Discipline

Not all grogs behave and not all grogs act with the bravery and discipline required of them. And it comes to Tostig to ensure his men know that there is a line that shall not be crossed. He is not afraid to impose corporal or even capital punishment but understands that these should be used sparingly. His biggest regret is that he had cause to hang one of his men after he was caught raping and

stealing. There was a suspicion that the man was being influenced by devils, but that's no excuse.

And being used to handing out punishments and knowing what his men will respect and what they won't, he knows when a magus is pushing things too far. Though he must carry out the orders given to him by magi, if he sees them step out of line he will approach them, away from others, point out their mistake, and prompt them to put it right before it gets out of hand.

A Risky Plan

His life, and the lives of his men, are in the hands of the magi every bit as much as the magi rely upon them. And he can't keep the magi safe if they do foolhardy things and ask the impossible. As a result, he challenges anything he deems unsound. He has a keen understanding of his men and their capabilities. Fighting in the open is no problem, but take them underground, or use magic to allow them to fight beneath the sea, and he will point out the danger. He hates plans that rely upon his men being enchanted in some way, after all if the magus who cast the spell falls, where does that leave the plan?

The Gauntlet

Tostig is a good leader and has much to teach the younger generation, even apprentices going through their

gauntlets. He makes a solid one-off companion to an apprentice or young magus given his first assignment. He ensures that the magus is safe, takes orders well, but corrects any mistakes and helps his charge learn from them. And once the story is done, Tostig returns to the turb.

And any time a magus wants some kind of weapons training, why not use Tostig to fill that role?

Appropriate Stories

The one-eared faerie wolf may return one day and Tostig may remember its distinctive tracks and its habits. He knows it was the strongest of the wolves he faced that day and urges caution. He'll press to lead the hunt for the beast. Regardless, as the only one in the covenant to have faced the wolf, he's an important resource to use.

Tostig's luck will run out one day and his approaching death could easily be the catalyst for stories.

His Decrepitude Score will continue to increase until a terminal aging crisis becomes inevitable at which point he dies a peaceful death away from the road and comforted by friends. But what if he has a last wish? What if it is to see his one sweetheart one more time before he dies? What if he needs to know the truth of his birth, whether Edsel was his father, and what became of his mother?

Unable to do these things for himself, the magi and their companions must help their old servant in his last hours.

Alternatively, once that crisis has been rolled on the aging table, why not send the old boy out on one last hurrah? Tell the story of Tostig dying in battle to protect his covenant and his magus. Send him to Avalon across the water. Leave him trapped in faerie to live out his last days defending the bridge, time and time again. Give him the final glory that he never gained in all his years of service. After all, once he's dead he won't be coming back.

Variations on a Theme

Winchelsea is a small town on England's Kent coast and it has a reputation for producing tough sailors, smugglers, thieves, and mercenaries. This is actually just a character flourish appropriate for one saga, so his name and place of origin can be changed quite easily. There's little else to tie him to a particular place or even nationality.

The keys to Tostig are not his Unaging Virtue or his proficiency with an axe, but his strong leadership in the field, his loyalty to the covenant, and his weakness of taking his betters to task for their actions. His great age lends him a degree of authority of course but it isn't essential.

Coming Soon in Sub Rosa Issue 7

The Storyguide's Handbook: The Enemy Within

The storyguide's handbook investigates one of the most frightening of hell's weapons.

Nelda's Lament

A young girl and her lover flee the wrath of her enraged father, and the magi find themselves involved yet again but this time there may be a

chance to profit from the affair.

Beyond the Fields We Know: The Rubezahl

Timothy Ferguson details the Rubezahl, a Bohemian faerie inhabiting the roles of storm god or king of the gnomes.

The First Age: Playing Ars Magica First Edition

We follow a troupe as they play the first edition of the game and explore what's changed since 1987.

The Ghost in the Snow

Complementing the recently-released Rival Magic, this article presents both a challenge and an opportunity for your magi in the form of a lonely tortured giantess with the blood of frost giants in her veins.