

# \*\* the Tuq \*\*

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a zine by Bryn Hammond

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*I splash with milk liquor the spear point of my tuq;  
I bang my black drum, the bull's hide that bellows;  
I sit astride my warhorse with the stripe along his spine.*

## Old Hands (i)

For my 1st issue of the Tuq, I jot a few thoughts on Old Hands in *New Edge Sword & Sorcery Magazine*. Spoilers for #3, but I talk about individual tales in subtitled sections, so you can avoid those you haven't read. To be continued: next month I'll look at Old Hands in #5 and #6.

When the NESS Discord server tossed around possibilities for what to call a theme of older characters, I strongly backed Old Hands: in its simplicity, one of the few phrases for age that has nothing negative, and assumes only experience. No other assumptions.

## Youth spells, who needs them?

'Gravediggers of Carsonne' by John R. Fultz, NESS#3. Our hero's age: 'over fifty'

*He told her the rest of his sad tale in plain words.*

Brugo, for me, is Fultz's most likeable character. I've read a Fultz collection, his first *Scaleborn* novel, and a couple of Brugo outings, the other in *Old Moon Quarterly*. I'm keen to keep Brugo's company again.

Brugo's become a drunk since he lost his wife twenty years ago; his ex-army ex-mates have their lives together whether as farmers or mercs, while Brugo can't stick at a job. But he sticks to a friendship – singular, his 'last remaining friend'. Slint is younger and rasher, but Brugo doesn't look down on him from the haughty heights of fifty; they're rough equals across an age gap. This loyal friendship, as felt and enacted by Brugo, is a major charm of the tales.

The plot turns on an anti-aging amulet that the wizard antagonist gave to a woman in her youth. Brugo prefers her at her real age, around the age his dead wife would have been (not the age he last saw her): without the amulet she's 'a fine woman of somewhere between forty and fifty years'. The woman abandons the amulet of her own volition – she isn't addicted to her youth spell, treats it as a nuisance; she thinks the magic of it necessary to impress the men she leads, but she isn't seen to 'exploit' her attractions, to lead them. It's a neat anti-ageist plot.

Mellow is an age-word: 'he mellowed in his age', sometimes. I gather that Brugo is softened. Not hardened by experience but gentled by it. From his couple of tales, I gather he feels more, or more range, than he did as a young fighter-adventurer. And if that includes strong moods of melancholy, hey, I've liked melancholy characters since I was twelve.

Athos was my Musketeer of choice, from the start, with his troubled past, his infliction of his sins upon himself in bouts of drink, and his tender, near-fatherly affection for D'Artagnan. Aha, that's why I took to Brugo.

## A spark of light

'Beating Stars, Dying Hearts' by Matt John, NESS#3. Our hero's age: 'fifty years'

*He cared only for the people who crossed his path.*

Unlike Brugo, Lachmannon isn't an old character across his tales, but is visited here at fifty. I haven't read a stack of Lachmannon yet; out of those I've seen, I'm attached to this tale. I'm moved by it. The world has been screwed over by ego-trippy technocrats of wizards and by a popular uprising that only worsened the situation (ah –

don't let that stop you, folk at home); total planetary collapse is upon us. I say 'us' because this pre-apocalyptic atmosphere feels pretty pertinent.

Lachmannon doesn't expect life, his own or anyone else's, to go on more than a few months or years into the future. What does he do with the time that remains? He has a daughter, an unknown girl he rescued from foul magic, who's affected by that sorcery and can't live to grow up whether the world ends or not. But she doesn't know that, he hasn't told her, and in one ripe apple on a blighted tree the girl sees life enough to enchant her, to enjoy. Lachmannon sees no promise, he dismisses the single apple as a random sputter of the past.

Nevertheless he goes and climbs a tower in a wreck of a weird city to fetch for her next a crystal sphere with a galaxy of suns and moons and scintillation inside, 'a star from the City of Light'. For whatever she might see in it, however briefly – for a spark of joy and hope before the end. He even admits there might exist a possibility he can't see himself, other than The End. His daughter might be right.

Lachmannon has failing eyesight even before he loses an eye in this story, but in his age, he has shifted towards devotion to another person, who's worth everything, even when he believes in nothing.

## The inertia of age – or not?

'The Betrayal of the Rhinoceros' by Premee Mohamed, NESS#3. Our hero's age: 'middle forties'

*Pick a side.*

Middle forties ain't old, even in the wear and tear of S&S, but Shujar has that age cop in his head: he so much thinks he's old that when his lover asks him why they can't go forwards with their affair, he rejects several answers and ends up, 'I'm too old for you.' And the other man points out, 'I'm six months older than you, Shujar.' Which, since they had a 'friendship of decades' before they tried lovers, Shujar ought to have a sense of, even when he's stuck for explanations. The trouble is, he despises himself for lack of decision, lack of courage, and I guess internal ageism is a way to shape that to himself, an excuse to fall back on. It's a strange exchange.

A lot of people cede their lives to everything that's said of 'middle age', as if they have to live a stereotype – don't start me on that. Shujar is on the wrong side of a war out of 'inertia', nothing worse. His ex-lover and still-friend has conviction and is with the rebels, not the royalists.

The crux of the story is Shujar standing up for himself, at the urging of his friend, and committing a bravery to betray the royal fortress to the rebels. The rebels aren't assumed to be better but the royals were known an evil, and now at least there's a chance.

Which lets me bracket these three tales: I like them because our aging heroes choose a speck of hope or a spot of engagement. Your average S&S hero in age is likely to be beat-up and melancholy, but none of these three turn to an unfeeling cynicism. You know what, cynicism would have been passive; these stay active.

– That's three men in a row, as characters, but don't worry, next time it's three women old hands.

## Zines & me

I have milkcrates of fanzines from the paper-and-mail 80s, when I was in *Blakes 7* fandom, with a few collected from before my (writing) time, 70s classics of Kirk/Spock slash. My sister Julie Bozza, who was into this zine culture alongside me – they edited and published a fair few, I only wrote – volunteers for a Fanzine Project that digitalises paper zines to conserve on An Archive of Our Own (Ao3).

So, zines? I've missed them; I had enormous fun, getting into the old spirit as I started up this little zine – which I expect to devote mainly to comment and review of sword & sorcery, with asides on heroic epic & romance of the past (and present?). I'll probably lob a bit of poetry at you, too.

*until the tuq flies again – bryn*

*I consecrate my standard with fat and with cream; his tails fly, he is tall in the sky...*