

A Sword with a Face by Schaeffer Cox

Long ago, when battles were fought with swords, and honor was what men lived for, a champion was born in Damascus. Year by year he grew in skill as he survived one battle after another. When the fights would come to an end, and those left standing would return from the field, their first ritual was to repair the damage done to their weapons. It was a deeply personal task. Like picking up the pieces of your own car wreck, or sifting through the ashes of a house fire you narrowly escaped. Each nick in the blade was tied to a flash memory of a swing that could have spilled your lifeblood, or that of your foe.

This champion, as fate would have it, was also a master blacksmith. And so, as his body was still healing, he would take his faithful sword back to the forge where it had been made in the beginning. There he would repair it in the furious heat of the old kiln. As he did this time and again, he noticed that the repairs from past battles never broke in the same place. The old scars never chipped or lost their edge. It was only the untested places of the blade that would fail in combat. And with each reforging, his blade grew stronger. The sword that his father had given him long long ago was now so covered with scars that it was only vaguely reminiscent of the shiny blade that had been presented to him in his youth. To the untrained eye, the sword was hideous, rippled and discolored from the

wounds of war, and the heat of being remade. It took a kingly champion to see the glory of this weathered blade.

After one particularly long battle, that was in the course of one particularly long war, our champion nearly lost his life. But as fate had kept it's hand upon the champion's shoulder, he was once again among those few men left standing. However, this time his sword was so beaten and deformed that it was rendered useless. Upon returning home, he was faced with the unthinkable possibility that his beloved sword may finally be beyond repair.

That sword had become a part of his soul. To turn his back on it and put it away would feel like a betrayal of all he stood for and all he had fought for from time before time itself. He had named the sword. And what's more, none knew the name of the sword, save it's maker alone. So the champion heated the kiln as hot as the fires of hell and plunged the beloved sword into the white hot coals. Drawing it out he took a new hammer and flailed against the blade for two days and into the night of a third. The sounds coming from the blacksmith's shop were worse than the terrible sounds of war. The champion fought against the sword all night, and the sword wrestled back. The hilt was hot as fire in the master's hand as he gripped it with relentless determination. But it seemed that it was actually the sword that clung to the champion. With each

ring of the hammer's blow the sword seemed to cry out "I won't let go until you bless me."

Never once did the champion let the steel cool. He hammered the glowing blade out until it was as flat as paper, then folding it back on itself he would form it back into a thick, straight and true blade; only to repeat the violent process again, and again, and again. Hundreds of times he did this. And hundreds of times it left a scar that ran the full length of the sword, from razor tip to robust tang, deep to the core of the blade. As the sun rose the third day, the crisp light of dawn revealed that the hundreds of scars left by the champion's folding and flattening had formed a pattern along the blade, like a fingerprint unique to that sword, given by its maker, breathed into it by the living breath of fire. From that day forward, the wars that it would fight would be trivial by comparison to the hell fire it had been through with its maker. From that day forward it never lost its edge. It could bend and not break. It would not chip. It was a blade like no other.

The champion from Damascus held his sword high in the sun light and admired its rippled surface. It looked like dragon's skin, and was equally as strong. There was no part of this blade that had not been made and remade in the fires of hell to which it had descended. The sword

had a name, but now it also had a face, and an identity, and a limp. It had been blessed.

No one ever learned the name of this legendary sword -- save it's maker, of course -- but from that day until now, a blade reborn by fire in this epic way is known simply as, A Damascus Blade.

--Schaeffer Cox