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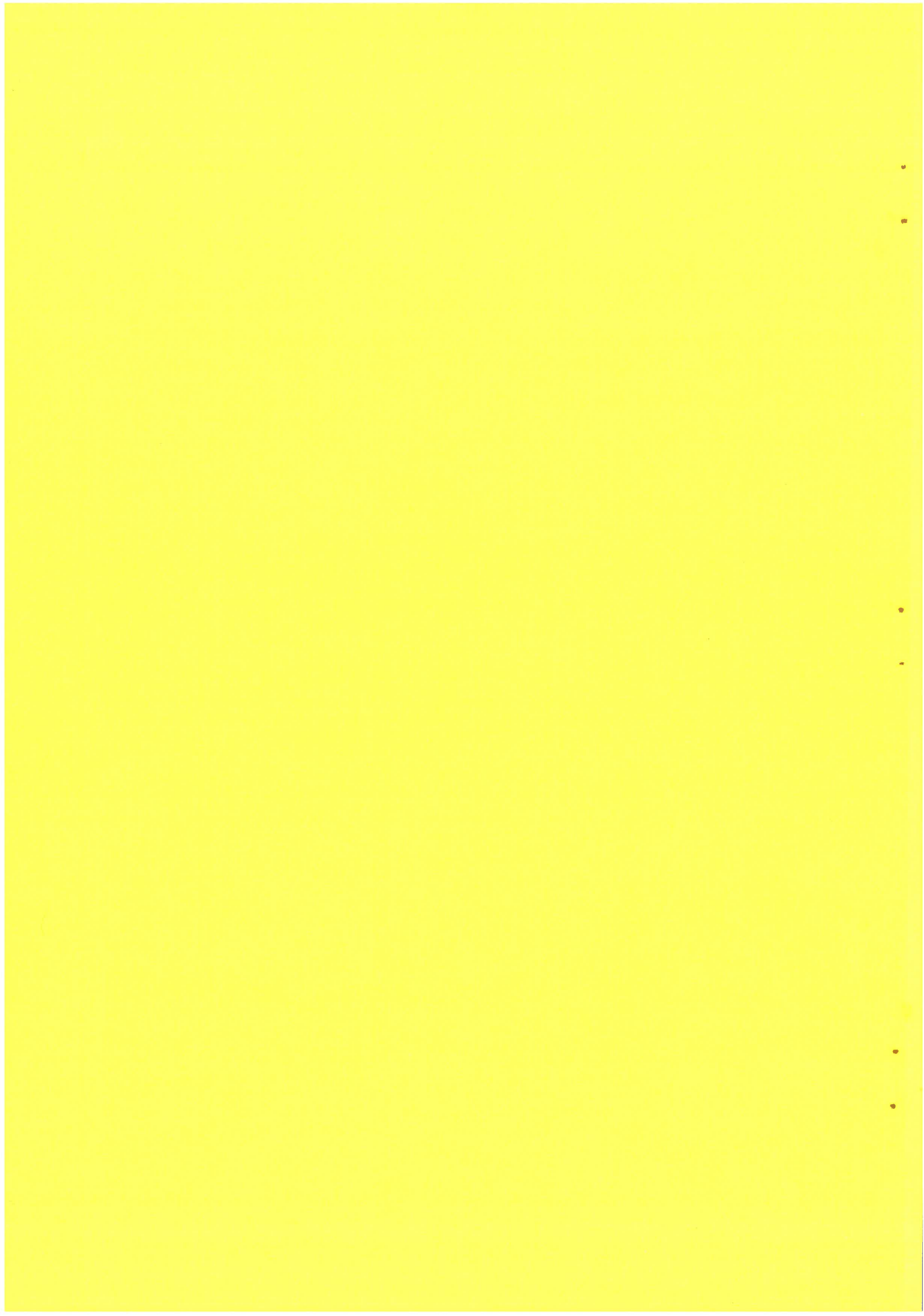
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Fickle Gods And Burning Oil
By Luke Forsyth

A bitter wind pulled at Altrac's cloak, as if trying to finish the job of freezing him that the morning snow had almost accomplished. He scowled at the heavy grey clouds and drew his cloak around him in a futile endeavour to keep the chill hands of winter from stealing the last of his warmth away. Walking along the mountain highway, Altrac stumbled in another of the frequent potholes that seemed to litter the highland track, invisible under the sheath of freshly fallen snow. Lifting himself from the ground, he took the leather water pouch from his shoulder and sparingly sprinkled some of the red solution over the white mantle of snow covering the concealed pothole. Glancing back at the frequent red patches of snow it was obvious that the highway was in need of urgent repair.

He cursed his misfortune at being placed on point in such loathsome weather, and fat Balcus, the caravan driver, for giving him the duty. Plodding on, Altrac reflected on the circumstances that had brought him into the mountains so late in the year, when every other sensible mercenary was enjoying the company and warmth of some wench in a tavern back in Medavin. If only he hadn't decided to do the same thing he wouldn't have had the harlot steal his summer wages while he slept. Now he'd been forced to hire out to the final caravan travelling to Hajik-et-Rayun before the seasonal winter snows closed the pass through the Calsinia Ranges. He was not looking forward to wintering in the filthy Rayuian city, suffering the suspicion and contempt of its inhabitants. It was true that the city state of Medavin hadn't been to war with its neighbour for over two years, but that didn't mean that the people of the two kingdoms hurried to share mead with one another when they had the opportunity to come together. The prospects for the winter did not look good and Altrac lifted his head skywards, wishing to the Gods he was in Medavin.

Altrac's thoughts halted abruptly as he stood in one more of the snow veiled potholes, plunging face first to the ground. Balcus and the other mercenaries in the wagon behind erupted into laughter, shouting sarcastic encouragement and giving mock applause. Swearing and holding back a caustic remark about fat wagon drivers and their lackeys, he raised himself from the ground and marked the snow again with the red water. Besides from exposing the potholes, his additional duty was to act as scout, searching for any signs of bandits, or worse, Galags. The barbarians claimed the mountains as their home and frequently raided the merchant caravans using the pass. Shivering, he thought it unlikely that even the cold-hardened Galags would venture out in such inclement weather, and bandits certainly wouldn't. At least the barren, rocky pass gave him a reasonable view of the wilderness, even with the snow falling.

As Altrac came rounded a corner in the path he saw thick inky smoke rising from behind a rise a few hundred meters in the distance. Raising his hand to halt the caravan he moved down the track to scout out the smoke. Probably other travellers stopping to warm themselves and eat a hot meal was the only idea he could think of, or wanted to think of. He was just about at the top of the bluff when he heard the faint cry of a horn float upon the breeze from over the hill. It held none of the beauty that the Bards of Medavins horns had or the importance of the Heralds of the Medavin court. It sung a bloody melody of hate, blood and death. It sung of the Galags.

Altrac broke into a cold sweat, his heart racing as screams drifted from the

valley. He crouched low and crawled the rest of the way to the crest of the rise, adrenalin pumping through his body. Peering down the valley, Altrac was buffeted by the previously shielded cries with horrifying violence. The scen below was one of carnage. Soldiers bearing the royal Falcon tunic design of the Rayuian house of Majik were impaled on stakes in a circle on the floor of the valley, as if in cruel mockery of the scarecrows that lived in the fields of his fathers farm. A carriage was lying on its side to the left of the dead soldiers. It was burning furiously and Altrac saw what he thought was a charred black arm protruding from beneath the chasse. And dancing around the whole gruesome scene were the perpetrators, two score painted Galags. They made a capering dance around the grisly circle of dead soldiers shrieking out in their own harsh tongue. Altrac felt the bile rise in his throat and had to quickly look away to stop himself from bringing up his morning meal.

He was just about to run back to the caravan when a new scream from the valley curdled his blood. He looked back to see another man being impaled alive onto one of the Galags stakes. The man continued to struggle even as the shaft skewered him. Altrac's head swam, his eyes unfocused and bile once more rose at the terrible spectacle taking place before him. This time he could not help vomiting, gratefully accepting the solace that retching gave him from the scene below. He looked back again to see the last agonising squirms of the impaled man before the body went limp, sliding down the pole slightly before settling. He hung from the pole like a disused marionette in some giant puppeteers wardrobe.

The Galags were now huddled together in a pack, shouting and gesticulating over something which Altrac couldn't see. A pleading, emotional voice seemed to be coming from the centre of the Galags which Altrac thought was that of a woman. Laughter broke out among the Galags and when a group of them moved off to resume their ritualistic dance around the dead men, Altrac saw that the crying indeed came from a woman huddled on the ground, her arms wrapped around a cloth covered bundle that emitted infrequent cries. The buddle, Altrac realised hollowly, was a baby.

He wondered why they had not murdered the woman then remembered some fireside tales he'd heard of Galag raids on villages at the base of the mountains. They slaughtered the men and stole the women, taking them away to become concubines, baby-makers. The infant was probably a boy, able to be moulded to the murderous ways of the Galags, or used as a slave when he was old enough to walk. Altrac crept away, crawling down the hill until he thought it safe to get up and run back to his caravan.

He was sweating profusely by the time he got back to the caravan, partly from exertion, partly from fear. Balcus had a angry scowl upon his round visage, but when he saw Altrac face it faded.

"What is it Altrac? You look as if you seen your Ancestors," Balcus's harsh, throaty voice was edged with concern.

"Galags. Two, maybe three score. Around the turn and over the next rise. They've ambushed some travellers and their Rayuian escort. The soldiers are dead, spitted and so is some other man. They've captured a woman and her baby. They look as if they won't be moving for a while, too,". Altrac's words came in gasps, as he gave his report while trying to catch his breath. He dropped to his haunches, both physically and mentally exhausted by what he'd seen, sucking in air to soothe his burning chest.

"Damn! What of their sentries, did you see them ?".

"No. Though theirs bound to be at least a couple on the fringe of the pack,". He

had his head bowed still feeling ill from what he had seen, and failed to see the fear that quickly darted across the pudgy red face of Balcus.

"This leaves us in a fine jam now, doesn't it." Balcus's brow creased in thought. " We turn back. That's the only choice we have. If we continue we'll run into the Galags. Altrac, scout the rear with Tarwi.".

"But what about the woman and child. Surely we can't....".
Altrac's appeal was cut short by Balcus's agitated, shaky voice.

"Don't be a fool, Altrac. They are as good as dead. We can do nothing to help them that won't kill some or all of us.". Balcus turned to the rest of the mercenaries,

"The rest of you men, we'll take the carriages and the horses away from the road until they return,".

Altrac turned, the felling of helplessness and anger melding together in a confusing mixture. There was logic to what Balcus said, but it was a logic which his heart believed should be ignored. He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see Tarwi searching face staring at him.

"He's right, you know. Even if his argument is driven more by his own cowardice rather than any feeling of responsibility towards us. We' d be slaughtered. If a Rayuian escort was overpowered then how do you expect a handful of mercenaries to do what they couldn't. Come we have work to do,". Tarwi strode by back down the track. Altrac waited, composing himself, then followed him. He hastened after Tarwi, feeling as cold and emotionless as the frosty wind that buffeted the barren wilderness.

They were no more than two hundred meters away from the caravan when Tarwi noticed footprints in the snow, crossing the track. They veered over to one of the red water marks Altrac had made. Whoever had left the marks had closely examined the red stain, as their imprints were jumbled and close together. The footprints leading away from the red blotch were spaced further apart as if the person was running. Altrac looked up at Tarwi and seeing the fear in his face guessed that their thoughts were the same. They were discovered. Wordlessly the two turned and sprinted back to the caravan. Altrac's legs burned with the effort of having to run through snow, but the fear coursing through his veins overpowered any physical urge to slow. If the Galags had discovered them after their raid on the Rayuians, then they would most likely strike straight away, while the bloodlust was still upon them.

Rounding the final bend, they charged up the rocky slope to where the wagon was hidden. A small granite outcrop jutted out from the hill forming a natural wall facing down the hill. They were almost to the boulders when Tarwi screamed. Altrac turned to see the feathered end of an arrow protruding from the mercenaries's back. Adrenalin surged into his body and he put on a burst of speed and dived for cover while arrows thudded into rocks around him.

"We're dead, we're dead, we're dead,". Altrac turned at the sound of the voice and saw Balcus quivering and sobbing against one of the granite slabs. The other men were staring disgustedly at him. Altrac was glad to see however that they had all drawn their long swords and broken out their bows and arrows.

"Dammit Balcus, you coward, shut up and grab a sword!,". Altrac snarled. When Balcus didn't respond, Altrac walked over and slapped him across the face, drawing blood from the corner of the merchants lip. This seemed to get a response and Balcus quieted, shakily drawing his sword.

Altrac turned to the other mercenaries, "All isn't lost. At least we have a

defensible position. We now have no choice. We either fight or die.". Any further conversation was silenced by the blast of a Galag horn and the battle screams of warriors. Altrac looked out to see at least twenty Galags running up the slope towards their rocky protection.

"Wait until they are in range before you fire!" Altrac shouted above the wail of the Galag horns. He desperately tried to think of some plan of action. Everything was moving so quickly and before he knew it the first lot of arrows twanged from the mercenaries bows and the battle had begun. The first flight took down seven Galags, who fell to the ground with arrows sprouting from their bodies like extra limbs. The Galag charge stuttered, then surged onwards, allowing the warriors to only get off one more flight of arrows, killing another two, before the Galags came to the adamantine fortress. The next part of the battle passed in a blur of painted screaming faces, flashing swords and splattering blood. When the battle haze cleared the Galags had retreated. Of the twenty Galags three had escaped. Of the twelve that defended the rocks, four had fallen to the assault, one was Balcus.

The eight remaining warriors collapsed to the rocky ground, gasping for air and trying to bandage any wounds. A weathered looking warrior crawled up to Altrac, exhaustion showing on his blood splattered face.

"We won't survive another attack like that. We've got to retreat while they regroup.". The warrior, who he remembered was named Janic, looked up at him as a soldier looks to his commander and Altrac realised that the men had somehow elected him leader and were looking to him for instructions. The weight of leadership now joined with that of exhaustion and Altrac let out a deep sigh, raising his head to look at the tired faces of 'his' men. In his despair he was just about to tell them he was at a loss as to what to do, when the carriage caught his eye and he was hit buy a desperate mans inspiration.

"The carriage is carrying lamp oil, what else?". Altrac's voice carried a hint of excitement which infected his men instantly, and a number of them rushed to look in the wagon.

"Oil and arrowheads and dried fish," one of them shouted back.

The plan grew in Altrac's head, desperate but possible.

"Janic, you clear a path through the snow to that group of boulders up the hill. Davii," Altrac turned to a bearded man with a scar running across his cheek." you help him. When you're done grab one of those barrels of oil and pour a trail from the other barrels to the rocks. Take the horses and stay there. The rest of you break into two groups. One lot to guard, the other to help me set the wagon up.". Altrac felt his confidence growing with every word. This seemed to rub off on the men and they pursued their work with a vigour that they recently seemed incapable of ever having.

Altrac's group lifted the oil barrels off the wagon and stacked them underneath it. They then piled the arrow heads directly above the barrels, scattering them around as well.

Janic and Davii returned and poured the oil in a line from the oil barrels to the outcrop further up the hill along the path they had cleared. Altrac then broke a few of the remaining barrels allowing some oil to slowly leak out around the barrels. Just as he finished this that the sentry called for him. Altrac looked down the mountain and saw that the Galags had regrouped with more of their tribe. Now at least two score of the fur covered barbarians were gathered at the bottom of the hill readying to assail their the granite fortress.

Altrac turned to his men. "We will wait out their charge until we have released our first flight of arrows then we retreat up to Janie and Davii's position. Put the dead up against the rocks so they look like they are defending. This, hopefully, will cause the Galags to stop, giving us enough time to reach the bluff.". A wry grin crossed his face. "Then we'll see how long it takes a Galag to burn.". His men let out grim chuckles at this last statement, knowing what was in store for the barbarians.

No sooner had Altrac finished speaking than the Galag horns began to wail and the barbarians began their screaming charge up the mountain. They leapt from rock to rock charging with a battle lust that felt no fear, no exhaustion. Their war paint made them look like marauding demons, flying from the depths of the abyss. Altrac signalled for the first flight to be shot and then shouted the retreat. Heedless of how many of their arrows hit they dashed up the hill. Janie and Davii fired their small amount of arrows over Altrac's head as cover as the defenders dived behind the security of the rocky walls.

The Galags were at the wagon, leaping over the rocks and slashing the dead bodies with their wickedly curved swords. It didn't take long for the whole force to swarm over the rocky barrier that recently protected Altrac and the other mercenaries. Their charge stopped as they examined the lifeless, rocky hollow.

"Light the oil! Quickly! Quickly!," Altrac shouted at Janie. Altrac's cry sent the Galags charging up the hill once more. Janie fumbled with his flint, for what seemed to Altrac to be hours, desperately trying to get it to spark. The flint hit, a spark flew from the rock and landed in the oil trail. The oil caught, flaming brilliantly as if it was alive. It soared its way down the oil path, between the charging Galag and underneath the wagon. For a second nothing happened and Altrac felt his stomach drop. Then the earth shook with and ear shattering explosion as the oil barrels exploded. Flame mushroomed into the sky and a fierce burning heat washed over Altrac. The roar of the explosion was almost instantly followed by the ping of the arrow heads ricocheting off rocks and a rain of stones and smouldering wagon wood. He was momentarily blinded by the intense light and when his head cleared he realised he was lying flat on his back, blown backwards by the force of the explosion.

He got to his knees and looked over the top of the boulders. What he saw astounded him. The trap had certainly been effective, not only killing all the Galags in the vicinity the carriage but managing to blow half the hillside away as well. Where the wagon used to be was now a vaporous crater, the carriage and barbarians vanished. Those Galags not annihilated by the explosion were riddled with holes from the arrowheads or lying in smoking messes on the ground, bent in all manner of obscene postures. There were an unfortunate few who weren't killed by the blast but were writhing on the ground, trying to either extinguish the blazes that were slowly engulfing them or trying to stop the burning arrowheads from burrowing in deeper to their flesh. It was a vain effort as Altrac had already decided they weren't going to live.

Still slightly dazed by the detonation, Altrac and his men slowly rose to their feet, shaking the dust off their tunic, where it had mysteriously settled like on the ancient suits of armour in the Medavin court. They stumbled through the carnage killing those not already dead and swording others just for good measure. When they reached the crater all they found were the smoking remains of some barrel rings, a piece of an axle and something else which they didn't want to ponder on.

They were just returning to the horses when they heard a shout from down the

mountain. They looked down to see one lone blackened Galag holding the Rayuian woman in one hand, his sabre in the other. The struggling woman was crying and the baby which she carried in her arms was screaming, gasping between each sob.. Altrac and his men froze. The Galag stumbled for a moment, obviously badly wounded by the explosion, before crying out in his grating, panting, nasal Western.

"The woman and child go meet Ethgrix for what you done. I will go in .....". He let out a strange coughing, gargling noise and fell to his knees, pulling the woman down with him. His head bowed and with a gasping shudder he collapsed to the earth. The woman threw off the Galags hand and crawled away from the blackened corpse. When Altrac reached the woman she was gently nursing the now silent child, slowly rocking him back and forth. The Galag was dead, apparently from the abundant arrowheads that could be seen buried in the back of his skull. Altrac was amazed that he'd stayed alive long enough to grab the Rayuian and her child.

Altrac knelt down next to the woman and when he saw the deep black-blue welts that criss-crossed her shoulder and neck above her blouse, he quickly called for Janie to bring some water and cloth for bandages. He dressed the woman's many wounds as well as his own less substantial cuts. Up the slope his men were undertaking similar tasks.

My name is Hafissa,". The Rayuian woman said in a ragged, dry voice. "And I thank you for saving my life,". Altrac's eyes lowered when she said this, realising that it was chance that had brought her to the battle and chance which again saved her life.

"I am Altrac. Lets just thank the Gods we are still alive,". Helping the woman up the mountain to the horses, he mounted his men up and began the long ride back to Medavin.

He looked up and down the mountain pass. The snow was coming down more heavily now, and the wind which had seemed to disappear during the battle had now returned with a renewed ferocity, as if making up for its absence. A Grim smile crossed his face when he realised that he wouldn't be spending the winter in Hajik-et-Rayun. He remembered his wish of early in the day of nestling up to some women in Medavin and the smile disappeared. A scowl replaced it, and he cursed the Gods for granting his selfish wish for such a cruel payment. The winds mocking howl reminded Altrac that they were not safe yet, and maybe cursing the Gods was as foolish an occupation as asking them for wishes. The weary party marched down the mountain, the grim scene of the battle quickly lost in the swirls of the evening's blizzard.

Dungeons and Drunkenness
(or, Modifying the Rules)
Travis Hall

Since joining QUGS I have read numerous articles about many games in the Queensland Wargamer, but the articles which have interested me the most have been those about AD&D. This has not been because I like the articles, but because it is my game. I am a DM and, on occasion, a player, and I have found AD&D to be the best fantasy role-playing system <u>for my purposes</u>. I have underlined this because such a statement is sure to cause a stir amongst the non-AD&D role-players reading this. "Why AD&D when system XYZ does such-and-such better?!" they will exclaim. Well, this is the first point that I will cover in this article.

Please note that I did not say that AD&D is the best role-playing system. I said that it is the best system for my purposes. Many role-playing systems do perform certain functions better that AD&D. Many have a more realistic combat system. Come to that, some have a more realistic just-about-everything. Some GM's and players prefer these more realistic systems, but I have found that such systems make the game much more complicated, and this means that some emphasis is taken off the personalities of the characters, which I consider to be the integral part of the game, and placed instead on the mechanics of the game, which should be subsidiary to the former. Other systems are even simpler than AD&D, but although this would emphasise even more the personalities of the characters, I find that such systems have too little in the way of game mechanics to properly define the abilities of the characters and the results of their actions. A balance between detail and simplicity is required. I find that for the style of play which I prefer, AD&D gives a balance which is about right, and this is why I play AD&D. Other players and GM's may prefer a different balance and this is their right. All forms of play have their own advantages and all have an equal right to exist, but my article is intended for role-players in the AD&D style, and especially for players in the AD&D system. So will be most forthcoming articles, since I already have some ideas about further writings.

Now that we know why I am writing about AD&D, why am I writing at all? Well, to tell the truth, I'm writing this because I don't like what many other AD&D articles have said. One writer especially has managed to have me disagree with nearly every article she has written since joining QUGS and first receiving the Queensland Wargamer. I have also disagreed with her in actual play, though, since she was the DM, I bowed to her laws with relatively little protest on that occasion. This is not to say that I believe her to be a bad DM, just that I prefer, again, a different style of play. This, then, is the first issue within the AD&D context itself which I wish to address.

By now most regular readers should have worked out who this other DM is, but in the interest of salvaging what few diplomatic possibilities still remain, I will avoid using her name in this article. (Anyway, I do want this published.) This DM has written a number of articles for the Queensland Wargamer about rules changes and interpretations seeming designed to increase the realism of the game. I can

see the advantages of her rules expansions, but I do not consider the changes that she proposes to be necessary. Many writers in other magazines also propose similar rule changes from time to time, so the aforementioned DM is not the only writer with whom I disagree on this point. I have found that generally the rules given in the AD&D rulebooks are adequate and require no, or few, changes. (Note: Here I am talking about game mechanics, not things like world schemes and heavenly/outer planes systems and things like that. For these, see Queensland Wargamer No. 36, Cosmology and Roleplaying in the Afterlife, and hear-hear for all those DM's who go to the trouble of designing these things.) Certainly these rules are not entirely realistic, but if you want complete realism, why are you playing a fantasy role-playing game? The AD&D system is designed to allow players to attempt heroic deeds such as described in fantasy books with a minimal amount of fuss. Sure, the rules could be expanded to give the precise effects of injuries, but isn't a hit point system easier and, usually, more playable? The same goes for other aspects of the system. So, since the rules work and facilitate ease of play, a DM should not change the AD&D rules without good reason.

Of course, there are cases in which the rules do not work or are inadequate. In these cases the DM obviously must find or make something which does work. So, how does he do this? This is how I would do it, and how I would recommend other DM's do it. (Of course, many experienced DM's will already know this. It is those who do not to whom I write, meaning, of course, only helpful advice.)

First, look closely at the existing AD&D rules. Are you sure there is not already something in the existing rules which covers what you are looking for? Also, remember that there are now two editions of AD&D, and what one does not cover, the other may. This is the case with unarmed combat. A system for resolving unarmed combat was given in the original first edition DMG. Unfortunately, I and many other DM's and players with whom I have discussed the system have been completely unable to make sense of it. The second edition rules also contain an unarmed combat system, but few DM's or player's I have talked with like it, since its mechanics differ significantly from the mechanics of weapon combat, and introduce an unnecessary table, which does not seem to make sense. But, hidden away in an appendix in the back of the first edition Unearthed Arcana, there is actually a workable unarmed combat system. Now that we have an unarmed combat system, there is no need to make one up. (One thing to remember is that some slight conversion is required to make use of rules taken from first edition in a second edition game. Also the situation can arise that there is something new brought out with an inadequate system which replaces an old one which did work, but again, I have not yet found a case when some slight conversions do not produce the desired effect.) If no adequate rules can be found in any AD&D books, there is still another resource. The D&D rules are very similar, and so rules can also be stolen from there, giving rules which still retain the spirit of the game. (Note: I mean the original D&D, not the crappy new edition pseudo-RPG boardgame, although the Cyclopedia may be useful - if anyone actually owns it.)

If after all this searching no rules can be found, the next step is to make up some rules. I would not go running to the QUGS magazine library to look up suggested

rules in some obscure article. I would make up a set of rules covering the area in question, not just to avoid research but so that I know the style of system which I wish to add to my game. These rules need not be adopted without consultation, but do give a standard with which to compare other rule systems which might be adopted. One example of this process are my own rules for consumption of alcohol and intoxication. The first edition DMG contains a table of effects for different levels of intoxication, but nowhere in the books are rules saying exactly how much alcohol is needed to achieve each level of intoxication given. One way to work this out would be to attempt to correlate the table of effects with the blood alcohol content of the character, found from his weight and the amount of alcohol consumed in a given amount of time, but although the effects of a given BAC may be known in real-world terms, there has never been, nor was there ever intended to be, a direct relationship between real-world terms and AD&D game stats, so our rules are really just a matter of guesswork anyway. Instead of going through this unnecessarily complicated procedure, I turned to the game stats I already had. What is alcohol really? Well, it's really a drug, also known in the game as a form of poison, so of course, a save vs poison is an obvious way to avoid its effects. But if a save vs poison is the only thing stopping a person getting drunk, characters will be quite easily intoxicated and also, every character should have a different amount of resistance to alcohol, varying with far more variables than merely class and level. So I need something which can take this into account. Should I add a stat to everyone's character sheet for resistance to alcohol, perhaps rolled on 3d6 like the other attributes? Did I hear you agree? If so, you deserve a headbutt. I already have such a stat. It's called constitution. So, how do I use it? I know of only one common use for a stat, other than the various modifiers they give to other rolls. In this case what I want is a Con check. Roll d20 and lets see what you get. If you make the check, you're lucky, no effects. If you don't, oops, you're feeling a little woozy. But are you really drunk enough to take game penalties? (Hmm, I think, half my PCs are drunk. Better give them another chance.) How about that poison save? Roll it. If you make it, you're fine (until the next...). If not, take the first level of intoxication, and the penalties. Now the second drink. Now the alcohol is building up. Everyone can make this next Con check with a -2 penalty to the score - oh, you're not feeling too good after the first, even though you made the poison save? Make that -4. Same goes for the poison save, if anyone needs it (by now some will.) Third drink. Same penalties for the second as for the first, but don't forget the previous penalties. Now everyone has penalties to check and save of -4 to -8. Eventually, the character will reach "slight intoxication". When he does, let's not make him go to the next stage too soon. He can lose the penalties and start again. When check and save fail again, he is moderately intoxicated. Start again, go to great. Start again, fall over and snore. As you can see, eventually even the hardiest characters will keel over, but also the second level wizard with a Con of 7 can (and in my campaign has done) reach slight intoxication on his first drink, as (I think) he should. Tough characters will drink for ages, and dwarves, known for their drinking, may drink for longer than anyone else because of their bonus to poison saves. (Halflings also do this, but who ever played an alcoholic halfling anyway?) Now the system works about right and is playable. Also, modifiers can be easily applied in certain situations. Strong drink? -1 (or more) to rolls. Paladin's god does not approve of

drinking? Lose +2 to poison saves for this situation only. Drinking feywine? Elves get +4. Everyone else gets -6. (I haven't looked into that one closely yet, don't use it without thinking.) Etc, etc, etc...

What I have just described is my thought process when making up rules for covering an area not included in the standard rules. As you can probably see, I started with something which was in the rules and extrapolated to give the required rules for my new system. As I went, I fiddled with the system to find ways to make it a more accurate and realistic system, while still retaining the elements of fantasy which involve the area I am trying to cover. Also, I have kept the number of new stats required to a minimum (here, and preferably always, zero) and have allowed for ways that the system can use simple modifiers to account for the new variables found in a particular situation.

Now I have a system which I like. One more step in my rule-making process remains. How does this conform to other players', DM's, writers, etc, rules for this area? I take my system and ask what others think. I look at what the gaming mags say (usually asking others if they have seen a related article, rather than searching for the back issues for something which may not exist.) Maybe someone has a better system. Maybe someone can suggest improvements to my system. But at least now that I have my own system, I am not blindly accepting what someone else says works and then figuring out later that I don't agree. I have a system which I consider workable for comparison, even if not use.

So, now a summary for good rulemaking. 1) read the rulebooks. It may be there, or in a similar set of books. 2) make up what you like, using existing stats where possible. 3) consult. Improvements are always possible. My procedure for making my rules for the effects of alcohol is the sort of thing which I consider to be the correct way to go about making up rules, even though I know many people will not like the rules themselves. So, apply the procedure to the same situation yourself (ignoring my ideas) and see what you come up with. Whatever it is, I'm sure it will work in your campaign, and I'd love to hear about it.

Incidentally, since I first wrote a rather rough first copy of this article, my alcohol effects system has been used a couple of times, most recently when one party member (a dwarf with high constitution) took revenge on an enemy recently turned friend (a minotaur) by drinking him under the table. By the end of the contest, the dwarf had reached a state of great intoxication, and the minotaur was comatose. The contest took a most entertaining ten minutes. And now, til next we meet, may your dwarves be drunk and your minotaurs unco. Bye!

SOME THOUGHTS ON BRICKS FOR CHAMPIONS

Of the four stereotyped character groups in Champions, Bricks are
in many ways the easiest to design. Take a high Strength
characteristic, a reasonable Constitution, high Physical and Energy
Defense, stint on the Dexterity and Speed, add Resistant Defense if
you want to be bullet-proof, and you have designed a Brick.
Simple, combat effective, and dull. You may think that Bricks are
boring to play, because they have few tactical choices, or you may
consider them monotonous, because nearly all Bricks are designed
along the same lines. However,neither of these claims is
necessarily true! This article will demonstrate that Bricks do have
choices in combat, and that Bricks can be designed in interesting
ways.

For many players, combat is the most important element in their
role-playing. Certainly, if you want to find something that four or
five Champions players can do together, combat is the obvious
choice. After all, most of the game system is about resolving
violence between two or more characters. Character interaction
may be preferable, but it is not as easy to organise and tends to
lack the motivation that a good fight generates. Of the different
character groups, Bricks are very good in combat, because they
are intended to be. All of a Brick's characteristics and powers are
geared towards combat. Their high Strength lets them dish it out,
and their Defenses and Constitution help them take it. Both
Martial Artists and Bricks are hand-to-hand fighters, unlike
Energy Blasters and Ego Weeds, but there is a notable difference
in degree between the two. In a straight fight between a Brick
and a Martial Artist, my money's on the Brick. And here's why.

It is obvious that Bricks usually have a low OCV, and usually lack
a ranged attack or martial arts package. However, these are not
critical losses. Firstly, a Brick can lift big objects, and throw them
at people. Area of Effect attacks can be real killers for Martial
Artists, Energy Blasters, whoever: tried Diving For Cover away
from a Mac Truck recently? Secondly, martial arts only improve
attacks that most people already have. With the exception of the

drinking? Lose +2 to poison saves for this situation only. Drinking feywine? Elves get +4. Everyone else gets -6. (I haven't looked into that one closely yet, don't use it without thinking.) Etc, etc, etc...

What I have just described is my thought process when making up rules for covering an area not included in the standard rules. As you can probably see, I started with something which was in the rules and extrapolated to give the required rules for my new system. As I went, I fiddled with the system to find ways to make it a more accurate and realistic system, while still retaining the elements of fantasy which involve the area I am trying to cover. Also, I have kept the number of new stats required to a minimum (here, and preferably always, zero) and have allowed for ways that the system can use simple modifiers to account for the new variables found in a particular situation.

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For many players, combat is the most important element in their role-playing. Certainly, if you want to find something that four or five Champions players can do together, combat is the obvious choice. After all, most of the game system is about resolving violence between two or more characters. Character interaction may be preferable, but it is not as easy to organise and tends to lack the motivation that a good fight generates. Of the different character groups, Bricks are very good in combat, because they are intended to be. All of a Brick's characteristics and powers are geared towards combat. Their high Strength lets them dish it out, and their Defenses and Constitution help them take it. Both Martial Artists and Bricks are hand-to-hand fighters, unlike Energy Blasters and Ego Weeds, but there is a notable difference in degree between the two. In a straight fight between a Brick and a Martial Artist, my money's on the Brick. And here's why.

It is obvious that Bricks usually have a low OCV, and usually lack a ranged attack or martial arts package. However, these are not critical losses. Firstly, a Brick can lift big objects, and throw them at people. Area of Effect attacks can be real killers for Martial Artists, Energy Blasters, whoever: tried Diving For Cover away from a Mac Truck recently? Secondly, martial arts only improve attacks that most people already have. With the exception of the

NNDs, all a martial arts manoeuvre does is improve OCV, DCV or damage. Bricks can punch, grab, throw, escape, block, and dodge anyway, and when you can do 14d6 against your foe's PD, what do you need 2d6NND for? Even if a Brick has a low DCV, this is not as great a problem as it is for other character types: after all, if the Brick can't take the blow, it's unlikely another character will.

Tactically, it's actually worthwhile for Bricks to Brace against Knockback, since a Brick's biggest problem in a fight is getting to grips with the enemy. Because of their low Speed, Bricks can't afford to have to spend a half-phase getting to their feet and another half-phase moving back to the fight every time they get hit. And they will take the big hits, because that is the function Bricks perform in superheroic battles. The Energy Blasters and Ego Weeds hide behind the Bricks, while the Martial Artists skulk off to the sides. Brick must protect their teammates from enemy attacks, both by closing with the enemy and by occupying their ranged attackers. Very few opponents have the nerve to shoot people in the second line when the first line is about to knock their block off in one second. If you enjoy the fights most of all, if you want to play a key role in your side's strategy, and if you want to avoid being knocked out in one hit by some lucky martial artist, play a Brick.

Furthermore, Bricks don't have to be boring. Bricks can be designed in several ways, with interesting optional features. Firstly, a movement power never hurts. As mentioned previously, Bricks can have problems getting into close range of the enemy, and a movement power eliminates this problem. Flight is the most popular choice among players, partly because Flight is another combat effective power and partly because Superleap is very silly (unless you like looking like an anthropomorphic kangaroo). Other movement powers tend to lapse by the wayside when players design characters, unless they are creating a clone of Namor, the Submariner. Secondly, if your GM lets you, a ranged attack makes a Brick fearsome. One of the problems with Energy Blasters is that they have comparatively poor defenses and a large attack, so they are targets for the enemy. Bricks are robust, and

difficult to take down, and invulnerable Energy Blasters are very dangerous. Ditto for invulnerable Ego Weeds.

Special effects can also be entertaining. Several comic book characters have a normal form and an invulnerable form, such as Colossus (who transforms into organic steel), the Golden Age Hourman (who takes his miracle pill and becomes stronger for precisely one hour), Captain Marvel (who says the magic word "Shazam" and becomes super-intelligent as well as -strong, -fast, -invulnerable, and generally -incredible), and, of course, that All-American Hero, Roger Ramjet (whose pills give him the strength of twenty atom bombs for a period of twenty seconds). A common explanation for a Brick with the powers of superstrength, invulnerability and flight is that they have telekinetic powers and perform their superheroic feats by the use of force fields and telekinetic strength. One of my players explains Rogue's powers (originally stolen from Ms. Marvel) in this way.

To take this idea a step further, a Brick can be designed using normal characteristics by selecting the powers Force Field, Flight, Strength (doesn't add to figured), and possibly Energy Blast. They would be a greater challenge to play than most Bricks, because they lack the high Constitution and Stun of the typical Brick. Bricks with the power to absorb kinetic energy seem to be a recent phenomenon in the comics: I can think of Strong Guy from *X-Factor* and Sudden Death from *Hawk and Dove* comics. Martial Artists with superhuman strength have been around since the forties, and Spiderman is a classic example, but really strong Martial Artists, like Timber Wolf of the Legion of Super Heroes, don't appear all that often. Of course, such Bricks have high Dexterities, Speeds, martial arts packages and very good CVs, but in exchange for these advantages they lose their high defenses. Spiderman's tough, but he could lose to one lucky shot from a Martial Artist, and he certainly isn't bullet-proof. Hopefully, this brief survey has shown that Bricks can be both combat effective and interesting to play. They certainly have a lot going for them.

Gary Johnson

Getting Better: My New Proficiency System
Darryl Greensill

The standard AD&D proficiency system is, to its detriment, rather flat. If a character has a Wisdom score of 15, that character always is 90% likely to succeed in any test of horsemanship (Land-Based Riding), even though the character may be a citydweller who is a total novice with horses and only recently learnt how to ride one. Another character, a steppe nomad of Wisdom 11 who could ride before he could walk, may be only 55% likely to successfully urge his mount to jump an obstacle. Furthermore, it would cost the nomad *four* of his estimated eight slots at third level to achieve a level of proficiency equal to the urbanite.

This highlights three problems with the system: (a) while an attribute score should affect the character's skill, practice should be far more important, just as it is in the real world; (b) due to the parsimony of the system with slots, characters wishing to practice are forced to forgo all other learning; (c) "background" abilities are too expensive to bother with. Also, difficulty of tasks is not adjusted for; characters are deemed able to do a given task or not, and if they can, the chance of doing it is set. There is no given system of bonuses and penalties for proficiency checks.

I suggest an alternative system as follows.

1. *Double* the base number of non-weapon proficiency slots given. Also, double the number due to the character by virtue of Intelligence. Every time a character is listed as gaining a non-weapon proficiency slot, s/he gains 2. Multi-class characters use the best progression of their two or three classes.

2. In order to gain a proficiency, the character must spend the listed number of slots, plus 1 if it is outside his/her standard group. This will give the character a base skill equal to his or her appropriate attribute, adjusted by the check modifier, divided by two, rounded up. If this result is less than 4, the character cannot learn the proficiency. For example: Spellcraft learnt by a fighter with Intelligence of 17 costs 2 slots and provides a base skill of $\lceil(17-2)/2$ or 8. No character with Intelligence below 9 is capable of learning Spellcraft.

3. Each further expenditure of a slot will provide a skill increase of 4. No more than four slots total, including the base cost, may be spent by a character on any given proficiency.

4. If you allow bonus proficiency slots to be applied to weapon proficiencies, the rate of exchange should be 2:1.

A table of adjusted attributes against slot expenditure to provide skill is given below.

I suggest adjustments for difficulty of task as follows: easy tasks, such as running downhill or reading a children's book in the character's native language, receive a bonus of +4. Tasks of ordinary difficulty receive neither bonus nor penalty. Difficult tasks, such as attempting to navigate through unknown waters, or read a language related to the character's own, receive a penalty of -4. Tasks of extreme difficulty, such as determining the duration of a spell never seen before or growing a crop of a type with which the character is completely unfamiliar, receive a -8. Finally, tasks of unique difficulty, such as creating magical items (presumably for or with the assistance of a spellcaster), or an "intuitive leap" with a knowledge-type proficiency, coming up with something technically possible for the character to create but virtually unknown in the world, such as a simple mechanical-frame type bicycle, should receive at least a -12. Obviously other modifiers can be applied, and "intuitive leaps" that promise the destruction of game balance should not be allowed. However, there is nothing wrong with characters coming up with relativity theory, or non-Euclidean

geometry; neither of these requires a high technological level and both *may* be relevant in a magic–using society, especially a Spelljammer campaign. But they should not be allowed to do it *often*.

If a character as a result of adjustments and skill achieves a chance of 20 or higher, s/he can normally be assumed to succeed automatically. Note that the high end of the table is not likely to be relevant in a non–Dark Sun campaign, but is included for completeness' sake.

Table of Skills

Adjusted Attribute	Base skill	Base skill + 1 slot	Base skill + 2 slots	Base skill + 3 slots
1-6	Ineligible			
7,8	4	8	12	16
9,10	5	9	13	17
11,12	6	10	14	18
13,14	7	11	15	19
15,16	8	12	16	20
17,18	9	13	17	21
19,20	10	14	18	22
21,22	11	15	19	23
23,24	12	16	20	24
25,26	13	17	21	25
27,28	14	18	22	26
29,30	15	19	23	27

THE DIPLOMACY TOURNAMENT

The following game of Diplomacy was played at the QUGS Meeting on the seventh of August, 1993. A Diplomacy Tournament had been scheduled for that meeting, but unfortunately there weren't enough players to fill two boards. Hopefully, more people will be available for the next club tournament, whenever and whatever it is, because this game was certainly entertaining. (N.B. any order which was erroneous has been left out of this article to avoid confusion on the part of the reader. Instead, any unit that was given an invalid order has been recorded as holding.)

SPRING 1901
Austria F TRI H, A VIE-BUD, A BUD-SER; England F EDI-NORW, F LON-NOR, A LIV H; France A MAR-BUR, A PAR-GAS, F BRE-MID AT; Germany F KIE-HOL, A MUN H, A BER H; Italy A ROM-TUS, A VEN H, F NAP-TYR; Russia A MOS-UKR, A WAR H, F SEV-RUM, F ST PET(S)-GOB; Turkey A CON-BUL, A SMY-ANK, F ANK-BLA.
Results: all of these moves succeed.

FALL 1901
Austria F TRI H, A BUD-SER, A SER-GRE; England A LIV-YOR, F NORW-NWY, F NOR-DEN; France F MID AT-POR, A BUR H, A GAS-SPA; Germany F HOL H, A BER-KIE, A MUN-BER; Italy A VEN H, A TUS S A VEN H, F TYR-TUN; Turkey F BLA-BUL(E), A BUL-GRE, A ANK-CON; Russia A UKR-SEV, A WAR H, F GOB-SWE, F RUM S A UKR-SEV.
Results: all of these moves succeed except for F BLA-BUL, A BUL-GRE, A SER-GRE, A BUD-SER.
Builds: Austria A VIE; England F EDI, F LON; France F BRE, A PAR; Germany A MUN; Italy F ROM; Russia A MOS, A ST PET; Turkey F SMY.

SPRING 1902
Austria F TRI-ALB, A VIE-TRI, A BUD S SER H, A SER S BUD H; England F NWY H, F DEN-SWE, F LON-ENG, F EDI-NOR, A YOR-LON; France F POR-MID AT, A SPA-GAS, A PAR-BUR, A BUR-RUH, F BRE-PIC; Germany F HOL-BEL, A KIE H, A BER-SIL, A MUN-RUH; Italy A VEN H, A TUS H, F ROM-NAP, F TUN-ION; Russia A WAR H, A SEV S RUM H, F RUM S A SEV H, F SWE-NWY, A MOS-ST PET, A ST PET-FIN; Turkey F SMY-AEG, F BLA-BUL(E), A BUL-GRE, A CON H.
Results: all of these moves succeed except for F DEN-SWE, A PAR-BUR, A BUR-RUH, A MUN-RUH, F SWE-NWY.

FALL 1902
Austria A TRI S SER H, A BUD S SER H, A SER S BUD H, F ALB H; England F NWY-SWE, F DEN-KIE, F NOR C A LON-HOL, A LON-HOL, F ENG-MID AT; France F PIC-BEL, A PAR-BRE, A BUR S F PIC-BEL, A GAS S A PAR-BRE, F MID AT S A PAR-BRE; Germany A MUN-BUR, A SIL H, A KIE H, F BEL H; Italy F ION-E MED, A TUS S A VEN H, A VEN H, F NAP-ION; Russia A WAR H, A SEV S F RUM H, F RUM S A SEV H, A ST PET-NWY, A FIN S F SWE H, F SWE S A FIN H; Turkey F BUL(E) H, A CON S F BUL(E) H, A GRE H, F AEG S GRE H.
Results: all of these moves succeed except for F NWY-SWE, F DEN-KIE, F ENG-MID AT, F PIC-BEL, A BUR S F PIC-BEL, F MID AT S A PAR-BRE, A MUN-BUR, A ST PET-NWY.
Builds: England F LIV; Turkey F SMY.

SPRING 1903
Austria A TRI H, F ALB S F ION-GRE, A SER S F ION-GRE, A BUD S A SER H; England F LIV-IRI, F ENG S F PIC-BEL, F NOR-HEL, F NWY H, F DEN-SWE, A HOL S F PIC-BEL; France A BRE H, F MID AT S F PIC-ENG, F PIC-ENG, A GAS-PAR, A BUR H; Germany F BEL H, A KIE S

BEL-HOL, A SIL-PRU, A MUN-SIL; Italy A VEN H, A TUS S VEN H, F ION-GRE, F E MED-AEG; Russia A WAR H, A SEV-ARM, F RUM H, F SWE-BAL, A FIN-SWE, A ST PET H; Turkey A GRE-SER, F AEG C A CON-GRE, F SMY H, F BUL(E)-CON, A CON-GRE.
Results: There are two forced retreats, England F ENG and Turkey A GRE. Several support orders have no effect, because the attack they are supporting does not occur. Elsewhere, F DEN-SWE, A FIN-SWE, A CON-GRE, A GRE-SER, F BUL(E)-CON do not succeed.
Retreats: England F ENG-LON; Turkey A GRE has no valid retreat, and is destroyed.

FALL 1903
Austria A SER-BUL, A BUD-SER, F ALB S A TRI H, A TRI S F ALB H; England F HEL-KIE, F DEN S F HEL-KIE, A HOL S F HEL-KIE, F NWY H, F IRI-ENG, F LON S IRI-ENG; France A BRE-WAL, F ENG C A BRE-WAL, F MID AT S F ENG H, A PAR-PIC, A BUR-RUH; Germany A PRU-WAR, A SIL S A PRU-WAR, F BEL-HOL, A KIE H; Italy F GRE S A SER-BUL, F E MED S A ARM-SMY, A VEN H, A TUS S A VEN H; Russia A WAR H, F BAL-BER, A ARM-SMY, A FIN-SWE, F RUM H, A ST PET H; Turkey F AEG-ION, A CON-ANK, F SMY-AEG, F BUL(E)-RUM.
Results: Germany is driven out of Kiel, Russia loses Warsaw, and Turkey loses Bulgaria to attackers. England fails to retake the Channel, F BEL-HOL AND F BUL(E)-RUM both come to nought, and Turkey and Germany have been hammered.
Retreats: Germany A KIE-MUN; Russia A WAR-MOS; Turkey F BUL(E)-BLA.
Builds: Austria A BUD; England A LIV; Germany disbands A WAR; Italy F NAP; Russia A SEV; Turkey disbands F AEG, A CON.

SPRING 1904
Austria A BUD-GAL, A TRI S F ALB H, F ALB S A TRI H, A SER-RUM, A BUL S A SER-RUM; England F IRI-WAL, F LON H, A LIV-WAL, A HOL S F KIE H, F KIE S F BER H, F DEN S F KIE H, F NWY-NOR; France A WAL-LON, F END S A WAL-LON, F MID AT S F ENG H, A PIC-BEL, A RUH S F BEL-HOL; Germany F BEL-NOR, A MUN S SIL-BER, A SIL-BER; Italy F E MED-SMY, F GRE H, F NAP H, A TUS-PIE, A VEN H; Russia A SWE H, F BER H, A ST PET H, A MOS-WAR, A SEV S RUM H, F RUM S SEV H, A SMY-ANK; Turkey F BLA-SEV, F ION-TUN.
Results: Russia loses Rumania and England loses London. F IRI and A LIV bounce off each other in Wales, as do F BEL and F NWY in the North Sea. A SIL fails to take Berlin, while F BLA doesn't capture Sevastopol, but does cut A SEV S F RUM H, so the Austrian attack into Rumania succeeds.
Retreats: England F LON-YOR; Russia F RUM has no valid retreat, and is destroyed.

FALL 1904
Austria A GAL S A SIL-WAR, A RUM S F BLA-SEV, A BUL S RUM H, F ALB S A TRI H, A TRI S F ALB H; England A LIV H, F IRI S A LIV H, F YOR H, F NWY-NOR, F DEN-BAL, F KIE S A HOL H, A HOL H; France A LON H, F ENG S F MID AT H, F MID AT S F ENG H, A PIC-BEL, A RUH S F BEL-HOL; Germany F BEL-HOL, A MUN-KIE, A SIL-WAR; Italy A PIE-MAR, F SMY-CON, F NAP-TYR, F GRE H, A VEN H; Russia A SWE H, A ST PET-LIV, A ANK S F SMY-CON, F BER H, A WAR H, A SEV H; Turkey F BLA-SEV, F TUN H.
Results: Russia loses both Warsaw (again) and Sevastopol to multinational ventures. A MUN-KIE cuts a vital support for Holland, so that F BEL-HOL succeeds with the support from A RUH. Turkey has been reduced to two supply centres, Tunis and Sevastopol, although Russia still holds Smyrna, which Italy passed through in the Spring.
Retreats: England disbands A HOL, which has no valid retreat; Russia A SEV-UKR, A WAR-MOS.
Builds: Austria A BUD; England disbands F BAL; France F BRE; Italy F NAP.

SPRING 1905
Austria A GAL-UKR, A BUD-SER, A TRI S F ALB H, F ALB S A TRI H, A BUL H, A RUM S A GAL-UKR; England F KIE H, F NOR H, F IRI H, F YOR-LON, A LIV-WAL; France F BRE-MID AT, F MID AT-IRI, F ENG S F MID AT-IRI, A LON H, A BEL-BUR, A RUL S F HOL-KIE; Germany A WAR S GAL-UKR, F HOL-KIE, A MUN S HOL-KIE; Italy A MAR H, A VEN H, F GRE H, F NAP-ION, F TYR S F NAP-ION, F CON H; Russia BER H, A SWE H, A LIV S A MOS-WAR, A MOS-WAR, A UKR S A MOS-WAR, A ANK H; Turkey F TUN-W MED, F SEV-BLA.
Results: A MOS-WAR dislodges the unit in Warsaw, and cuts A WAR S A GAL-UKR;

however, the Austrian attack on Ukraine still dislodges the enemy unit. England is driven out of Kiel and the Irish Sea, while F YOR-LON fails. The new England player does not seem confident about his chances of survival.

Retreats: England F KIE-DEN, F IRI-LIV; Germany A WAR-SIL; Russia A UKR-MOS.

FALL 1905

Austria A UKR-WAR, A RUM S F BLA-SEV, A BUL S A SER-GRE, A SER-GRE, F ALB S A SER-BRE, A TRI S F ALB H; England F LIV-IRI, F NOR S A WAL-LON, F DEN-KIE, F YOR S A WAL-LON, A WAL-LON; France A BUR-MAR, A RUH-HOL, A LON-BEL, F ENG C A LON-BEL, F IRI-LIV, F MID AT-SPA(S); Germany F KIE S A MUN-BER, A MUN-BER, A SIL S A UKR-WAR; Italy F CON-SMY, F GRE H, F ION S F GRE H, F TYR-TUN, A VEN H, A MAR-PIE; Russia A ANK H, A WAR S A MOS-UKR, A MOS-UKR, A LIV S A WAR H, A SWE-NWY, F BER S DEN-KIE; Turkey F W MED-SPA(S), F BLA-SEV.

Results: F LIV and F IRI butt heads and accomplish nothing, as do F MID AT and F W MED. England fails to take Kiel for the same reason that Germany fails to recapture Berlin: both supports are cut. Austria fails to take Warsaw from Russia, and is instead driven out of the Ukraine, but it does conquer Greece with an attack at 3-2. Turkey drops to one supply centre, and England looks sicker and sicker, despite reclaiming London. On a positive note, France and Italy redefine their borders to their mutual satisfaction.

Retreats: Austria A UKR-GAL; Italy F GRE-AEG.

Builds: Austria A VIE; England disbands F YOR; France F BRE; Germany disbands A SIL; Russia A ST PET; Turkey disbands F W MED.

SPRING 1906

Austria A TRI H, F ALB S A TRI H, A GRE H, A BUL S A GRE H, A RUM S A GAL H, A GAL H; England F LIV-IRI, A LON H, F NOR S A LON H, F DEN-BAL; France A HOL S A BEL H, A BEL S A HOL H, F IRI S F MID AT-NOR AT, F ENG-NOR, F MID AT-NOR AT, F BRE-MID AT, A MAR H; Germany F KIE S A MUN-BER, A MUN-BER; Italy A PIE-TYR, A VEN S A PIE-TYR, F TUN-ION, F ION-ADR, F AEG S F SMY-CON, F SMY-CON; Russia A NWY-SWE, A ST PET-NWY, A LIV-PRU, A WAR S A UKR H, A UKR S A WAR H, A ANK-CON, F BER S F DEN-KIE; Turkey F SEV-BLA.

Results: Germany dislodges the Russian fleet in Berlin, which has just been surrounded on all other fronts by Russian and English units. France continues to surround England, and Italy stops Russia moving into Constantinople. However, the most interesting development has to be the Italian advance against Austria.

Retreats: Russia disbands F BER, which has no legal retreat.

FALL 1906

Austria A GRE S BUL H, A BUL S A GRE H, A TRI S A VIE H, A VIE S A TRI H, A GAL S A RUM H, A RUM S A GAL H, F ALB S A GRE; England A LON H, F NOR-NWY, F LIV-IRI, F BAL-DEN; France F NOR AT S F IRI-LIV, F MID AT S F NOR AT H, F ENG-NOR, F IRI-LIV, A BEL S A HOL H, A HOL S A BEL H, A MAR-GAS; Germany A BER-MUN, F KIE-DEN; Italy A VEN S A TYR-TRI, A TYR-TRI, F ADR-TRI, F ION-ALB, F AEG-SMY, F CON S F BLA-ANK; Russia A NWY H, A SWE-DEN, A PRU S A WAR H, A WAR S A UKR-GAL, A UKR-GAL, A ANK-SMY; Turkey F BLA-ANK.

Results: The Italian attack on Trieste succeeds 3-2, and would have succeeded even if F ALB S A TRI H, because the unit in Albania was attacked. Germany makes the unfortunate error of forgetting to hold Berlin in the Fall Turn, so the supply centre remains Russian. England is driven out of Liverpool by France, Russia is driven out of Ankara by Turkey with Italian help, and neither Germany, Russia or England move into Denmark.

Retreats: Austria A TRI-SER; England disbands F LIV; Russia A ANK-ARM.

Builds: Austria disbands A GRE; France A PAR; Italy A ROM.

SPRING 1907

Austria F ALB-TRI, A SER S F ALB-TRI, A VIE S F ALB-TRI, A GAL-BUD, A RUM S A GAL-BUD, A BUL-GRE; England A LON H, F NOR S A LON H, F BAL-GOB; France F NOR AT-NORW, F MID AT C A GAS-WAL, F ENG C A GAS-WAL, F LIV S A GAS-WAL, A GAS-WAL, A PAR-BUR, A BEL S A HOL H, A HOL S A BEL H; Germany A MUN-BER, F KIE S A MUN-BER; Italy

F CON S F AEG-SMY, F AEG-SMY, F ION-ALB, A ROM-APU, A TRI H, A VEN A TRI H, F ADR
S A TRI H; Russia A NWY S A SWE H, A SWE S A NWY H, A PRU-BER, A WAR S A UKR H, A
UKR S A ARM-SEV, A ARM-SEV; Turkey F ANK-BLA.
Results: Germany retakes Berlin despite Russian interference. Austria fails to retake
Trieste 3-3, so the situation doesn't change on the Austrian-Italian border. Once again
France lands an army in Wales, and Russia seals its southern borders by moving A ARM out
of Turkey and into Sevastopol.

FALL 1907
Austria A VIE S F ALB-TRI, A BUD S F ALB-TRI, A SER S F ALB-TRI, A GRE-BUL, A RUM-
BUL; England A LON H, F NOR-NWY, F GOB-SWE; France F NORW-NOR, F LIV-CLY, A WAL-
LON, F MID AT H, F ENG S A WAL-LON, A BEL S A HOL H, A HOL S A BEL H, A BUR S A BEL
H; Germany A MUN H, F KIE-DEN; Italy A VEN S A TRI H, F ADR S A TRI H, A TRI H, F ION-
ALB, F CON-BUL(S), F SMY-AEG, A APU H; Russia A NWY H, A SWE-DEN, A PRU-LIV, A
WAR H, A UKR-RUM, A SEV S A UKR-RUM; Turkey F BLA H.
Results: London, Rumania, and Trieste all change hands. Germany once again holds all
three of the German supply centres, while Turkey has exchanged Sevastopol for Ankara.
Austria keeps Bulgaria vacant, while England thinks of past times when Britannia ruled the
waves. At least Denmark remains English, thanks to the efforts of Russia and Germany.
Retreats: Austria A RUM-GAL; England A LON-YOR; Italy A TRI-TYR.
Builds: England disbands F GOB; France A PAR; Germany A MUN; Italy disbands A APU;
Russia A MOS.

SPRING 1908
Austria A GAL-BOH, A BUD S F TRI H, A VIE S F TRI H, A SER S F TRI H, F TRI H, A GRE-
BUL; England A YOR-EDI, F NOR S A YOR-EDI; France A PAR-BUR, A BUR-RUH, F ENG S F
NORW-NOR, F NORW-NOR, A BEL S A BUR-RUH, A HOL S A BUR-RUH, F CLY-EDI, A LON-
YOR; Germany A MUN S A GAL-BOH, A BER-KIE, A KIE-HEL; Italy F CON-BUL(S), F AEG S
F ALB-GRE, F ALB-GRE, A VEN S A TYR H, A TYR S A VEN H, F ADR S A VEN H; Russia A
NWY H, A SWE-DEN, A LIV-PRU, A MOS-UKR, A WAR-GAL, A SEV S A RUM H, A RUM S A
WAR-GAL; Turkey F BLA S F CON-BUL(S).
Results: Italy seizes both Bulgaria (south coast) and Greece, destroying the Austrian army
in Greece along the way. The Russian steamroller makes the cramped Austrian position
very vulnerable, as Austria is slowly crushed to death from both sides. In the north, a unit
has finally entered Denmark, while England is driven out of the North Sea. (Interestingly
enough, if England's orders had been A YOR-LIV and F NOR-LON, both would have
succeeded!)
Retreats: Austria disbands A GRE, which has no legal retreat; England F NOR-SKA.

FALL 1908
Austria A SER S F TRI H, A BUD S F TRI H, F TRI H, A VIE S A BOH-TYR, A BOH-TYR;
England F SKA-NOR, A YOR-LIV; France F MID AT H, F CLY S A BEL-EDI, F NOR C A BEL-
EDI, F ENG-IRI, A BEL-EDI, A HOL-KIE, A BUR S A RUH-MUN, A RUH-MUN, A LON-YOR;
Germany F HEL S A KIE-DEN, A KIE-DEN, A MUN-BER; Italy F BUL(S) H, F AEG-GRE, F GRE-
ALB, F ADR S A TYR-TRI, A VEN S A TYR-TRI, A TYR-TRI; Russia A NWY S A DEN-SWE, A
DEN-SWE, A PRU-SIL, A GAL-BUD, A RUM S A GAL-BUD, A UKR-WAR, A SEV S A RUM H;
Turkey F BLA-CON.
Results: Austria is ground into little pieces by Russia and Italy. Russia destroys A BUD,
which cuts a support for F TRI, which is thus destroyed by A TYR. England fails to stop F
NOR convoying A BEL, but retakes Liverpool. Not that this helps very much, since
Liverpool is surrounded and France can destroy the unit next turn. Turkey doubles in size,
and now controls most of Turkey! Germany halves in size as France rolls into central
Europe. However, Germany does have the last word about Denmark, moving A KIE in with a
support.
Retreats: Austria disbands F TRI, A BUD.
Builds: Austria disbands A TYR; England disbands F SKA; France A PAR, A MAR; Germany
disbands F HEL; Italy A ROM, A NAP; Russia A ST PET; Turkey A ANK.

It was now about 5 P.M., and the Austrian and German players decided to call it a day. The winners were judged to be France (11 supply centres), Italy (8 supply centres) and Russia (8 supply centres). Throughout the game, the balance of power had ebbed and flowed, especially in the east, where one country after another was trashed by its neighbours. In the west, things were much simpler: France pulped England, while Germany stayed quiet and Russia took Scandinavia from England. If the game had continued, the three winning nations would have had the opportunity to pulverise each other, until there was one (or two) left standing.

The alliances on the board were fairly standard in the first few years. France stayed at peace with all its neighbours, and took the supply centres in Iberia, while England took advantage of an incorrect German move to take Denmark as well as Norway. Germany never recovered from this poor start, because Russia and England kept on attacking throughout the game. In the east, a cold war developed between Austria and Italy, while Germany and Austria agreed not to attack each other. Finally, Russia and Turkey formed the Eastern Steamroller and began to move west.

Although England was occupied fighting Germany, it moved into the English Channel, which upset France and gave France an excuse to attack England. France moved against England's exposed underbelly in Spring 1903, actively helped Germany against the aggressors, and kept the peace with Italy. With the exception of Fall 1904 to Fall 1905, when Italy had a unit in Marseilles, the French-Italian neutrality pact was up and running throughout the game.

At about the same time as the initial French attack on England, Russia co-operated with Austria and Italy to stab Turkey in the back, officially because Turkey had moved its fleet into the Black Sea in 1901 and hadn't moved out until Spring 1902. At this stage, with Russia spread between Scandinavia and the Balkans, and with only one unit in the centre, Russia's position seemed weak, and vulnerable to a concerted attack from Germany and Austria. However, Austria chose to help partition Turkey, rather than seek the edge of the board, and paid for it later.

Austria's problems in the later half of the game seem to stem from this particular strategic choice, which left Austria stuck in the centre of the board between Italy and Russia, who combined to help each other against Austria later in the game. To be fair to the Austrian player, he was also ill with a bad case of the flu,

which explains his poor play towards the end of the game. Austria simply ran out of allies. France displayed a cool head in his dealings with the other major powers, and didn't enter into a war with Italy to try and keep Austria on the board.

All three major powers left on the board in 1908 played good games. The Italian player rose above Italy's poor starting position to dominate the Mediterranean and conquer most of Turkey and the Balkans. France took advantage of its natural advantages (good borders, plenty of nearby neutral supply centres to snaffle) and concentrated all of its force against one enemy. Russia ebbed and flowed alternately into Turkey and Scandinavia, juggling its concerns with care. Of the other powers, Austria played well in the morning session and poorly after lunch, Turkey displayed great diplomatic skills to remain on the board after Fall 1903, England spread itself too thin too early and paid the penalty against a determined opponent, and Germany did reasonably well after a botched start retarded its growth and gave it shocking strategic problems. Hopefully everyone had fun, and maybe QUGS will organise another Diplomacy tournament next year.

Gary Johnson

CUSTOM WEAPONS
Alister Whipp

EXOTIC BLADES

This is the first in a series of articles detailing customising the most common tools of player characters (with the possible exception of shoes.) Weapons proliferate in most campaigns to the extent that some characters start to resemble porcupines, yet the vast majority of these weapons are just standard, straight from the book, seen it a hundred times, weapons. I don't intend to list huge numbers of weapons so everyone can have a good pick, but instead describe how to come up with good ideas for something a bit different, and describe how the weapons work and how they are made.

Bladed weapons are by far the most common fantasy/historical weapon, and they have a habit of turning up even in high tech campaigns where much more dangerous weapons are available. Bladed weapons can be broken down to four basic features. The blade, the handle, the guard, and the other junk, you know, golden eagles' heads, hidden firearms, that sort of stuff. First, part four, the junk. Essentially this is anything that has nothing to do with the use of the item as a bladed weapon. This is the easiest to screw around with as it doesn't usually have any effect on the game statistics. What it does affect is people's impression of the weapon and its user. Basically any weird, socially deviant, ornamentation can transform your trusty bastard sword into a symbol of power. I strongly suggest this sort of extravagance as it adds character to your PC without worrying your GM about changing a weapon's stats to fit a new design.

The guard on a weapon is another area easy to change. The basic choices are: none (axes, some knives and swords, most concealed weapons), a shoulder (as on a dirk), a cross guard (you're probably familiar with this, I'm going to call them quillons from now on, just to confuse you though), and knucklebow, with or without finger rings (typical of rapiers or late long swords), basket hilts (as on broad swords), and shell guards (you've all seen cutlasses). Any changing around of guards or mixing of types (there are quite a few mixes that work well) will lead to something a bit different. Remember, if the guard has any game effect then adjust the stats apropriately. Ah, I just remembered another guard type, a plain ricasso typical of samuri swords, just a plain disk of metal between blade and handle. A guard's primary purpose is, not surprisingly, to protect the hand. It serves to hinder an enemies attempts to attack your hands and to keep your hand from the blade. It can also be useful in parrying an opponent's attacks. On the down side it can limit your movement. This is a reason some people prefer a simpler guard. Another reason is that if you intend to conceal the weapon it helps if is essentially flat, and preferably as thin as possible. An 18 inch Khukri (a knife from nepal, used by Ghurkas, and essentially flat) is easier to conceal than a 14 inch knife with a bayonet fitting.

Guards should be made of a tough material, as opposed to a hard one. The best materials that come to mind are various steels, or if you're really serious, a composite of some form, preferably fibrous, with some part of the composite hard enough to stop whatever it is you might want to protect yourself against. But you should always choose toughness over hardness as most of us would rather have a bent guard than a shattered one with possible fragmentation.

Handles for swords, etc, are often the most boring part of the weapon. This is because unlike the rest of the sword, a smooth glossy surface is a liability. That's not to say there aren't any weapons with ornate handles, but it is infinitely easier to simply cover it in leather. The importance of grip is strongly dependent on the shape of the handle and pommel (the "good" end). In fact some scimitars (the

ones used by near eastern peoples, not the orcish ones) have smooth jade grips. The handle won't slip, though, due to the shape of the pommel and the length of the handle. Common materials for handles are wood, leather, ivory, semi-precious stone (the easily shaped types), metals (esp. gold and silver), and good old reliable plastic. Typically the smoother the handle the more prominent the pommel. Carvings are good, the finer and more convuluted the better. Don't bother with painting, the paint will reduce your grip, especially when it starts to flake off.

Now the blade, the heart of the weapon. Blades are designed to hurt things, and there are various ways that they do this. The most basic is the hack. When hacking the blade is swung and the edge cuts in roughly perpendicular to the edge, with little or no other movement. Generally this requires a lot of force and hacking blades are generally recognisable as having a lot of weight significantly forward of the handle. This makes them unbalanced, and therefore slow, but also very deadly. The main drawback to these weapons (axes, kopis', khukris, etc.) is that while readying for a swing, your opponent possibly has time to kill you. The result is that people in heavy armour and carrying axes are very, very dangerous.

Stabs are the next easiest to understand. You get something pointy and stick it into your opponent's whatever. Obviously the best stabbing weapons are sharp and thin. You need to get as deep as possible and to do this you should use a sharp thin penetrator. You can push or swing it into him, (rapier or pick). But the thinner the blade gets the less damage it's going to cause and the easier it will be to break. So here is the balance: if you are skillful and you can strike for vital organs, then by all means go for a thin blade, but if strength is your strong point use something a bit thicker, for the extra mess it will make on the way through. Note that long thin objects with better points than edges have a nasty habit of being hard to pull out of people/trolls/etc.

Cutting and slicing are not the same as hacking. To slice the blade moves diagonally so it is drawn across the wound, like how you cut fruit. This is a lot better at cutting soft things (read "people") than hacking, and so the blades are lighter and faster. They typically have a long straight or curved back blade. The drawback is the effect armour has. Versus a hard metal surface, slicing is often just a good way to blunten your edge.

Another method, is to draw the sharp tip of a weapon across the surface of the opponent. This is generally called slashing or scratching and only generates surface damage, and really should only be used when you wish someone to have a scar without endangering them. As it is done with the point, the weapons that use it are any with a point.

Note there is a very fuzzy line between hacking and cutting, and a lot of weapons can be used either way. The more swept back the blade is the greater the tendency for it to be used for cutting. Also, for cutting or stabing the whole blade should be as smooth as possible to cut down on friction. Remember the bigger it is the slower, deadlier, and more impressive it is.