

On the night half-way through the season, at the mid-point between summer solstice and autumn equinox, you suffer a strange and powerful dream when you sleep. It is vivid - too vivid to simply be the eccentricities of your slumbering mind - and, when you wake, it remains imprinted into your memories rather than dissolving like mist.

In the dream, you see a large, hunched figure, gnarled and knotted, in a dark chamber where the ruddy flames of a forge-fire cast the scene in a bizarre black and orange chiaroscuro. Water drips and fire crackles, wood clatters on metal. The sound of a chain clamours and clinks as the large figure shifts, moves; an arm, too long, too inhuman, stirs something glistening in a pot. Bubbles seethe up from the oily mix, filling the air with fuming vapours.

The figure bears its teeth, glinting orange in the firelight, and you catch a vague impression of a monstrous and alien face.

Remember, it says - or seems like it says, in a rough voice that somehow just echoes right into your mind without a movement of the thing's lips. *Remember what you owe me. Remember what has been promised me.*

It stands then, unfolding, head brushing against the low, stony ceiling of this forge or cave or lair. There is a fresh flare of forgelight as it hauls a length of blazing metal from the flames, and shuffles further into the darkness. It hefts something heavy, something weighty that speaks to you of... *power*.

That something comes down, hard, crashing against an anvil with a spray of sparks. A hammer, then.

Crash

Remember what you owe me. The four who got away, Wise Maarit's students. Or five trained in the old ways.

Crash

I am waiting for my due, as promised to me.

Crash

I have promised you one year, creatures of the Marches. One year when I will stay my hand. One year for you to see through what was agreed.

Crash.

As was agreed under the summer solstice, under a sun...

CRASH

A SUN I CANNOT SEE! A SUN I HAVE BEEN HIDDEN FROM FOR CENTURIES! BY YOU! BY YOU AND YOURS! BY THE TREACHERY OF MAARIT AND HER STUDENTS!

CRASH

SO I GIVE YOU ONE YEAR. WHEN THE SUMMER SUN REACHES ITS APEX AGAIN...

CRASH

YOU WILL GIVE ME MY DUE, OR YOU WILL REAP THE CONSEQUENCES.

CRASH

You waken with a start, the vision blazed into your mind, the smell of forge-smoke in your nose and the sense of the fire's heat upon your skin.

Soon, it becomes clear you are not alone in receiving this vision. Word spreads. It seems that many Marcher artisans were touched by this same dream, this same message, in the night.

A name goes with the story as it spreads, one that stirs up unrest and fear.

Bloody Jack.