

## The Band of the Twisted Claw – 2008

The wagons appeared in Bristol under cover of darkness, soundless, leaving no tracks in the soft earth. The denizens of the local Public Houses, usually sensitive to any disturbance in their peaceful town, noticed nothing, though several commented on a strange warmth followed by a sudden chill.

"\_e've wet yerself, 'tis all," said one publican, "and then stood in the draft." Everyone laughed, but with trepidation. They had all felt the same thing. And none, save for the Widow Goosehawk, well into her eighth decade and well into her cups, had wet themselves.

Thoren Grymm, new arrived in Bristol, also felt the quick change from warm to cool. Thoren felt the change every night, and knew it for what it was; the nocturnal solstice, passing the powers that controlled day and night. He shifted in his wagon and glanced at the alchemical charts that he had stuck to the curved wall of his wagon with iron horseshoe nails. Never in his extensive experience with the mystic had he seen a horseshoe actually bring good luck, but cold iron was a strong defense against all number of things. His eye lit on a dot with a circle around it. The alchemical sign for the sun. Warmth. And near it, a crescent, sign for the moon. Cool. Strange the signs could co-exist side by side, on the same chart.

Thoren knew not from the symbols how his wagons had come to be in Bristol. He knew only that he was needed there. The wagons always took him where he was needed. Damn wagons.

The symbols did, however, presage conflict. Conflict between two ancient opposing Factions; the brave and noble Order of the Sun, and the wild, chaotic Lunar Tribe.

Thoren was an alchemist and a tinker, known to the people as an Alchemechanical, and thus one of the Order of the Sun. But he was also a Nocturmancer, a necromancer of night's magics, and a member of the Lunar Tribe. He was the only one of his generation with both bloods, and they fought within him as fiercely as the Factions fought without.

Few were the members of Order or Tribe who could put aside their differences and work side by side for a common cause. These few were Thoren's band - the Band of the Twisted Claw, named for the three-striped scar each member bore. The scars were inflicted in remembrance of the last soul to have both bloods, Veratrix Keap, who died from wounds delivered by a twisted claw ... the twisted claw of a dragon.

Tomorrow would come soon enough. Thoren Grymm had little time to discover his purpose here in Bristol. His Nocturmancer blood would need to find a graveyard soon. And his Alchemechanical blood needed a drink. As he considered these things he heard in the distance a low, rumbling, growling sound. He prayed it was thunder. He knew it was not.

He was going to need help. He was going to need a lot of help.