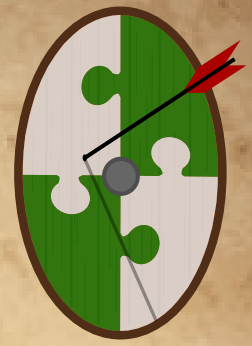


# AFTER THE COUNT



It has been a while since the previous night with no sound. The first silent night of each moon cycle always had a sense of foreboding. The last audio of the party on the square disappeared into the woods. Four clouds slowly made their way towards the moon, obstructing the source of light on this fine evening. It has been only one night ago that the village chief declared the festivities of the spring season opened. Four maidens and strong warriors dance around the campfire alike. The boar which was caught earlier was roasting on the spit, while brave hunters ventured to gather extra sources of meat.

As the parties continued, the druids gathered in the woods. One tree was standing out amongst the others, being coloured a lovely shade of red rather than green. A druid came forward, waiting until he was the one heard above the others. Even as two men remained in conversation, the druid looked at them pointedly.

“The event has to continue! Our village has been the strongest and smartest for years. We will remain the best.” As the druid spoke these words, the rest of the gathering started to get fanatic, except for the conversing two. They had not heard what was said. What event were they talking about? One of the men decided to come forward and ask. The druid was displeased with the behaviour of the two, truth be told. Nevertheless, he indulged in the question and told a rather grandiose tale of eleven neighbouring villages.

“The gods have descended upon us in the past. They requested us to find out which village is the best. The villages have to be able to govern themselves. We as gods can not always guide them. We will create a magnificent contest, where one apothecic village shall prevail. Three conveniently placed villages shall form the triangle in which the quests shall take place. Multiple quests shall be put out, to test wits and strength. Not one day shall be wasted in these quests. They shall be called: The Games of Gallia.”

The druids were preparing their magic potions to increase the strength of their villages beforehand. Three cocktails of herbs were concocted. There were birds sitting in the trees nearby, four enjoyed the scent of the elixirs so, they descended upon the kettle. Five steaming cups of the varying potions were put down. They would have to stew three evenings before consumption, which would give the druids enough time to test and improve their attempts.

Between the big group of druids, three gathered to discuss the finer details of the Games. One of the demands was that the druids of all villages organized it. In no way could a village be held responsible, as that could raise suspicions of foul play. It was decided that one group of druids would travel around the villages and request the presence of the others. A fortnight from now, they were to gather at the same place. One ebony-coloured paper containing the information to find the way was given to each druid that travelled. All druids pitied the game that would be hunted in the region, especially the six rabbits hopping past them. They would indeed not see a long life. The sound of the first hunting party already drew closer. It would not take long before the standard ten intoxicated strong-willed leaders disrupted the meeting. The time was drawing to a close, and everyone left. The last two druids quickly took the magic potions and hid them before joining the festivities before the Games as well.