



IT'S NOT A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT)



A scenario for 4 to 6 tauter, policing the annual reener game between Kask and Kesler.

INTRODUCTION

This adventure is set in the Khodres, where two rival towns will attempt to sabotage a 'friendly' game of reener by bribery, drugging, stealing, lying, and cheating. It will be up to the players to see that everything runs smoothly and to limit the damage if the odd transgressor eludes their vigilance. Although it's a rough 'n tumble Khodren escapade there's no reason why it can't be moved; instead of Kesler vs Kask it could be Joble vs Cavris, or Es'Wother vs Portgate. Any excuse for groups of people to hate each other - even though they live near one another and have much in common - will do. No particular season is specified but Auss or Crith are best for that rainy, muddy, sepia feel to the day.

BACKGROUND

For half a dozen years Kesler (see Issue 1) and Kask have competed against each other in an annual game of reener or 'run with the ball'. Each year grown men get a thrill out of playing a child's game, cavorting around in the mud and drinking lots of rusper afterward. The townsfolk gather and watch, gather and throw rotten gerrig heads, or gather, drink and try to join in. There has always been a traditional rivalry between Kesler and Kask, with no particular attention being paid to what the rivalry was about. Reener is the perfect excuse for a punch-up and some spleen venting, though it has never got completely out of hand. That could change...

THE PLAYER-CHARACTERS

The characters will be asked, ordered, or bullied into helping organise this year's game, and the policing of the event as a whole. This will be at short notice, because the police/militia who usually do the job are on strike or have been called away to deal with something more serious. The PCs responsibilities are split into pre-game, in-game, and post-game, and they'll generally need eight hands and six sets of eyes. The adventure is open-ended and is designed to induce a little positive stress; the players will

not get everything right or be able to cover all their bases, and big guns will do them no good at all. They'll need tact, foresight, keen observation skills, and leadership. All qualities that players have in abundance...don't they?

THE GAME

It isn't important to know the rules of reener, either for the adventure or for the PCs. However, the players may argue that their characters would have played the game themselves or they may want to do some scouting by watching a warm-up game. The only available one is being played by adolescents, who will try to be flashy when they realise they're being watched, and the PCs won't learn much (they will however learn a few choice Khodren curses). There are a few rules to the game, but in practice they tend to break down. This is because (a) local rules vary, (b) referees are neither very professional nor very conscientious, staying away from the most fierce action, and (c) no-one really cares. The most important thing to remember is that one team will be trying to get a heavy ball into the other's territory - pushing it out of one end scores a point - and the other team will be trying to stop them. To the untrained eye it looks like a lot of flying elbows, flailing legs, dirt, and wild tackling. The trained eye will confirm that this is true.

GETTING INVOLVED

The PCs will be contracted a few hours before shove-off, and will be shown to the site where the game is to take place. It is a natural hollow about midway between Kask and Kesler, surrounded on all four sides by embankments of rough grass and shrubs. The playing field is considered to be almost all of the space in the hollow, with a single rope fence separating spectators from the main action. A crowd of 400 or 500 is expected, along with hawkers, entertainers, and food and beverage vendors. The game will begin at noon and end a couple of hours later, when the daijic ascertain that the moons Lsuntra and Gobey are in a certain alignment.

PRE-GAME PREPARATIONS

1. The PCs will have to meet with the team captains, and there will be an immediate problem. Kask's captain, Filo Dimlerrin, turns up in a blue playing shirt, and Kesler's captain Killian LaLoosh (in red) will object. Blue dyes are notoriously expensive and this ostentatious act is an insult to the hard working people of Kesler. The PCs will have to make a ruling, and one team will be upset.

2. When the team sheets are reviewed Kask will single out one player as a 'ringer'. The offending player - Naroot Hefflinger - has apparently faced Kask four times already this year, for four different teams. Kesler will deny everything vociferously. A ruling is required.

3. The PCs must keep the ball safe before shove-off. It is a heavy leather sphere, made from thombo hide with strips of locurian grunder to thwart invisible dyshas from influencing the flight of the ball (10% chance). An hour before game time a small group of children will want to borrow the ball for a kickabout; if the players allow this they will sell it to a githerin who will strip the grunder and leave the flaccid ball behind. Everyone will be displeased, shove-off will be held up, and the PCs will have to improvise a new ball.



4. Liaising with the officials will turn up another problem. The referee is OK (he wears a tall white hat) but the two local daijic haven't been paid. Their fee is 20 gemules and the promoter is nowhere to be found. The PCs can pay them off, dismiss them, or make them a promise of payment after the game.

5. An argument breaks out between two vendors from Kesler; Ferrit Lunt and Treven LaLoosh are both patrolling the same patch at the south end with their pastries and each has been trying to out-shout the other. After a few minutes they are jostling and elbowing each other and the crowd around them are enjoying every minute. If the PCs don't intervene a basket of food will end up in the lap of a woman of high standing (who has a touchy husband) and if they do intervene they will be booed by the crowd and pelted with mushy fruit.

IN-GAME EVENTS

1. Shove-off will occur with a mighty roar from the crowd and the game will be underway. An enthusiastic muadra will release a pyrotechnic desti dysha into the air, which unfortunately will cause a bystander's hair to catch fire. The PCs will have to deal with the fire hazard and the offending muadra.

2. Kask take a 1-0 lead, and Kesler drive downfield to equalise. Kesler are about 5 yards out when the referee is caught in a pile of players and his hat flies off. Kesler score seconds later but the referee cannot be seen. The white hat resurfaces and the point is awarded. As Kesler jog back to the shove-off point the PCs see the white hat being thrown from person to person in the crowd and an irate man is attempting to retrieve it. This is the referee. He claims that a partisan donned his hat while he was stunned and allowed the point, which technically speaking shouldn't stand. The PCs will have to adjudicate (smart players may have tried signature skills to spot the bogus ref, or claim that they did so).

3. After 20 minutes it will begin to rain, and the PCs will be passed raincoats by cheery spectators. After a few minutes of being pelted by various objects an observant character will notice that all the raincoats have been painted with a target on the back. The crowd will begin chanting "Who's the gissyne in the mac" and pointing en masse on the last note.

4. With the scores tied 2-2 late in the half the excitement gets too much and a portion of the crowd on the north bank rush the field. About

a dozen spectators make for the ball. If the players allowed the point to stand earlier in the game (see 2) a large boccord will head for one of them with a length of rope and a mean look in his eye. This isn't actually a lynching attempt (though the players may think so), but he will attempt to tie a player to the back of a thombo and slap the beast so hard it runs for 5 miles without stopping.

5. At halftime - while a thivin band lustily entertains the crowd - refreshments of scented water and Khodren oranges are passed out. The oranges have been poisoned with a slight dose of halcen. This is not strictly illegal as halcen is a common pain blocker, but it can also cause drowsiness, which could obviously affect performance. The players may be quick enough to catch the offender making his getaway (he is a Kask supporter) but by then the teams will be tucking into the fruit. Due to a frenzy of greed at the refreshment table the oranges have gotten mixed up, and it will take the players a long time to sort out the which oranges were doped and which players ate them (skills in limilate prep will help). The PCs will need to sort out who needs to be substituted or what other action is necessary. A cruel GM may force a PC to take part in the game for a few minutes while a wobbly team member has a short snooze.

6. The second half finally starts and Kask assert their dominance. One Kask player laterals the ball to another, who looks like he's in the clear, but in mid-air the ball makes a frankly impossible swerve and Kesler regain possession. This is a caji disguising her dysha by making an invisible Power Orb, and the aftermath depends on how the PCs handled the disgruntled daijic (the PCs may have been acting as daijic themselves of course). If they were treated well the caji will be caught and the PCs must dispense summary punishment, but if the caji is allowed to get away with it she'll try more outlandish tricks as the game wears on. Eventually the PCs will have to deal with her, and she will fight back with lots of (non-lethal) dysha attacks...as will her spouse and a couple of younger dytes.

7. A group of crugar are upsetting the surrounding humans on the west side. They are

hissing loudly, making agitated scratching gestures, and flexing their black claws in and out of their paw sockets. Although to humans this looks like a show of aggression the crugar are actually having a good time, laughing and pointing at the slow and dim-witted humans fumbling around like greasy beagre in the mud. A heavy handed approach could ruin that mood completely. Very astute PCs may notice that the Crugar don't seem to be following the ball but concentrate on one or two players at a time, at which point they howl uncontrollably.



8. The PCs will get a tip-off that a Kask player has been paid extra to seriously hurt an opposing team member. They will have to decide what action to take. The information is correct but the player the informant singles out is the wrong guy.

POST-GAME

1. With the rain abated and the warmth returning to the hills the reener players are covered in mud and steam is visibly rising from them (and the PCs). Kask take a 3-2 lead, and then 4-2 as a Kesler player makes a glaring error. A few minutes later the daijic raise their yellow flags and the game is over. Kask win, revenge for last year's 3-0 loss. The players don't congratulate each other much, but at least they don't get involved in a mass brawl. All seems to be going well. However, the PCs will almost be bowled over by the Kesler player who made the game-losing

mistake; he is being chased by an angry mob, who will crash through the PCs seconds later. The player will hole up inside the caravan that the thivin musicians travel in, and the mob lays siege. The PCs will have to wade in; this could mean physically breaking it up (dangerous and difficult), creating a diversion allowing the player to escape (safer) or doing a Pericles bit by appealing to the gathered peasants (the most satisfying to role-play and certainly the least destructive option). The choice is theirs.

2. The PCs notice an inert woffen lying in the south-east corner of the field. He is on his back and his shirt looks to be stained with blood. Another woffen is slinking away and slipping some sort of object into his lawmners. It looks shady but nothing criminal is happening; the inert woffen is drunk beyond belief and has passed out, spilling a quantity of wug (a gravy heavy in blood) down himself in the process. His friend, embarrassed and unsure of what to do, is putting his wooc bread in an inside pouch and is off for some water to splash on his companion's face. The sober woffen is easily panicked and will run if the PCs coming blazing with all weapons.

3. If the PCs allowed Kask to use the red shirts, Kesler players will have torn them to shreds. The PCs will be required to pacify the Kaskians, and they may be threatened (emptily, as it turns out) with legal action.



RUNNING THE SCENARIO

The aim of the scenario is to provide the PCs with opportunities for decision-making, some very awkward but non-lethal combat, and social interaction with different racial groups. The episodic nature of the incidents is

unavoidable, and the GM should feel free to add, subtract, or otherwise alter the structure into a more coherent whole; but as long as the PCs feel harassed, tired, and wet, that may not be necessary. Have two incidents flare up at once, make the going tough for PCs attempting to reach one side of the field from the other, and generally put them under pressure. There are no challisk marks in it for them, but there is the reward of a slap on the back, a seat by the fire, and a large flagon of crusty herbis if they do well.

The reener game can be expanded to be the centre-piece of a larger festival. With a bit of work the GM can create other events and personalities to populate the surrounding countryside. Examples are easy enough - fire eaters, beaster shows, a croid fight, a caji firework display. If you've used Kesler before have some of the denizens of that town show-up and reacquaint themselves with the PCs. In fact many of the townspeople will be present as spectators or merchants. Perhaps an adventure of the GMs own devising or an old grudge can carry over into this scenario.

I haven't provided a diagram for reasons of space, but the GM will need one. This is relatively simple, but you may want to make accurate calculations of distance for running or jogging speeds and range weapons. You may also want to make weather conditions a factor. This is personal preference, so have at it.

REWARDS

The characters will be paid whatever was agreed at the outset, modified up or down depending on how they handled the situation. They will be given a commemorative item - most likely a pottery mug or brightly coloured sash - and as much alcohol as they can drink that night. The GM could assign miscellaneous Attainment Points in any number of skills, but a few D6 amongst Crowd Manoeuvre, Current Events, Entangle, Etiquette, Fast Talk, Gaming (Sports), Khodren Lore, Limilates, Oratory, Tackle, and Weather would not go amiss. If your players were especially diligent in pre-game preparations, such as organising tighter security and doing solid research, they should also be given their due for that.