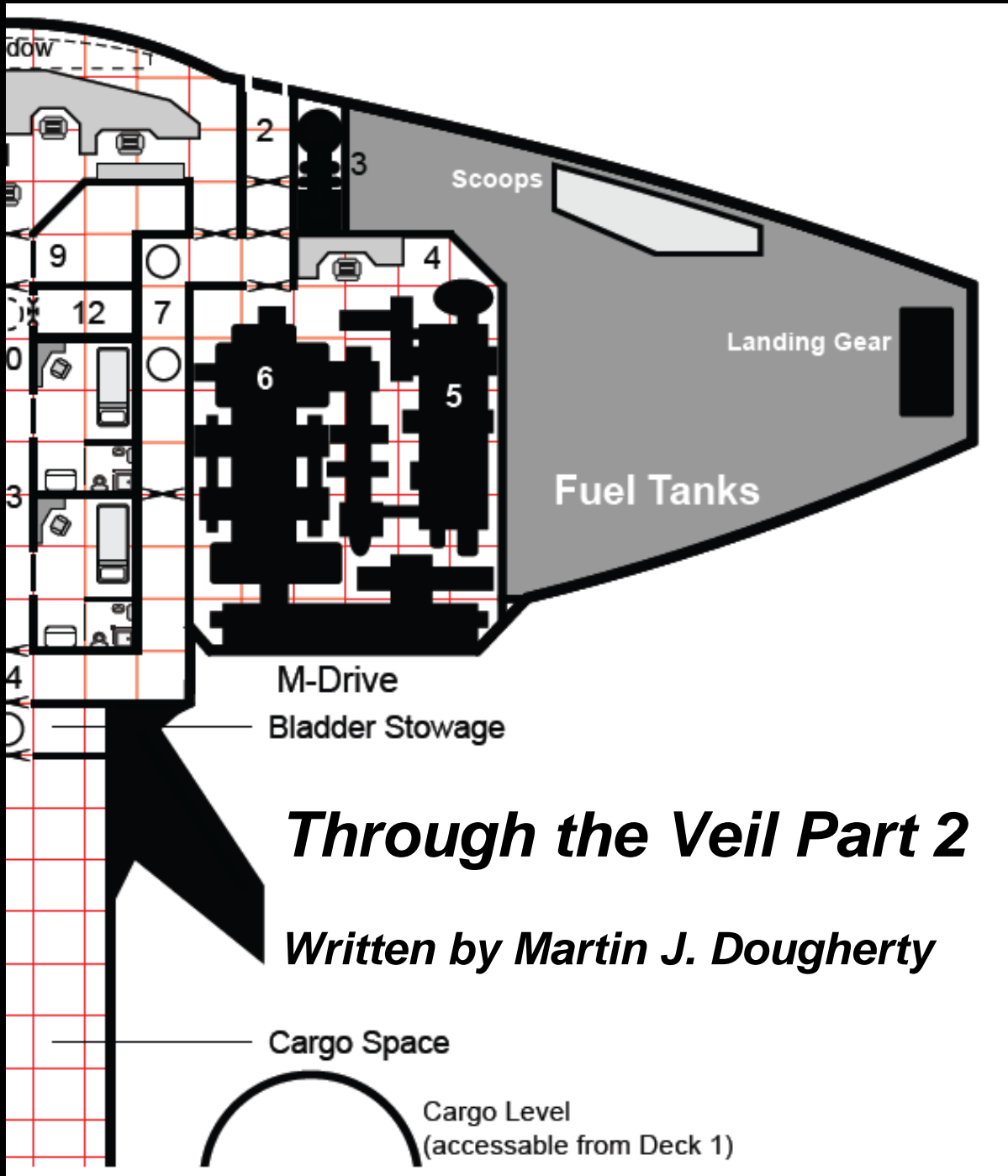




OUTER VEIL



Through the Veil Part 2

Written by Martin J. Dougherty

SPICA
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THROUGH THE VEIL 2

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THROUGH THE VEIL 2

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REFEREE'S INFORMATION

AVANIM SUBSECTOR

Avanim subsector is well beyond the 'civilised' regions and even its most important worlds have a fairly low population; even Avanim, the subsector capital, has less than 250,000 residents. This has implications for industry and economics in the region: what industry there is tends to be small scale and needs to be generalised in order to meet the various demands placed upon it.

A highly specialised industrial base is viable in a high-population region where there is a great deal of trade and it can be highly lucrative to specialise in a critical area. However, this is simply not possible on the frontiers. Local industry is somewhat inefficient where it exists at all but the alternative to home-building is to order in necessary items from the Core worlds near Terra, which is enormously expensive and time-consuming.

About half the sector is considered to lie in the Outer Veil. Beyond this area, many systems have received only a cursory official survey. A number of small, unlicensed colonies are said to exist; some of them outright pirate havens and others merely off the official map. Consequently the region can be lawless and dangerous; naval patrols are far less common in the outer systems and are fairly infrequent in the licensed colonies.

Avanim is an important military and government centre by the standards of the region, with a shipyard, repair facilities and military assets. The world acts as a staging area for colony missions and the population is sometimes swelled by large numbers of colonists undergoing final training for a well-organised mission or those who are stuck due to a logistical breakdown in a less well-prepared one. Avanim is a good place for experts to seek employment and for those looking to hire guides, surveyors, freelance scientists or mercenaries.

Gamma Pavonis V (Avanim 2020) C668321-7

Gamma Pavonis V is a 'garden world', ripe for colonisation; given time, it will almost certainly expand into a major economic and industrial centre. Its current independent colony status means that it receives less investment than a government or charter colony. Growth is slow and more or less entirely self-funded, with the occasional boost as small entrepreneurial businesses set up on-planet.

Gamma Pavonis V is a cold world but not intolerably so. Large areas are either inhospitable or mountainous and there is little land to start with but that leaves enough usable land to support hundreds of millions of people comfortably. Most of the land masses are quite small, with only one region worthy of the title 'continent'. There are numerous island chains, many of which lie far from the relatively large land masses.

Gamma Pavonis V was settled in a typical 'colonial hub and ring' manner, with a central town and several outlying settlements. Most of the 7,000 or so inhabitants live in the hub region, which is located on one of the smaller land masses near the equator. A few nearby islands are also settled but almost all of the 'official' population dwell within a few hundred kilometres of the hub. There are thought to be several small enclaves elsewhere on the planet but little data is commonly available about most of these.

A few of the small or unlicensed colonies are independent of but remain in contact with the main settlement. These include a private scientific/exploration base on the shore of the large continent. This land mass is very rugged, with extensive badlands and several mountain chains that include active volcanoes. Parts of this continent are habitable but most of these areas are boxed in by difficult terrain and have only been mapped from orbit, if at all.

Other groups are isolationist or simply too remote to have normal dealings with the main colony, though trading parties sometimes come in by sea. A few surface vessels and one or two cargo submarines operate between the main colony and the nearby islands, with a few craft making a longer tour of the unofficial-but-friendly outposts.

The main hub is a small town clustered around the rudimentary but reasonably efficient spaceport. It is surrounded by agricultural settlements and smaller steadings and a few scientific outposts, such as a weather station high in the mountains. A system of crude roads links these settlements and convoys of tough, locally-made trucks endlessly run food supplies in from the agricultural outposts and return with industrial items as needed.

Gamma Pavonis V is governed by the Gamma Pavonis V Colonists' Collective, commonly referred to as 'The Collective'. Every adult is entitled to one vote on important issues and most matters are settled by a straight majority. A system of proxy votes is allowed for those living in remote areas and this is gradually coalescing into a more representative system than the present participatory democracy.

Issues to be voted upon are proposed by anyone who wishes. The issues are debated at the local level, which can literally mean in a bar-room or over the dinner table in a single stead and put forward by an informal word-of-mouth system. Matters that garner enough attention are voted upon at the monthly 'Collective Business Meet', which is essentially an end-of-month two-day holiday.



Matters that require immediate attention are the responsibility of appointed individuals who hold various semi-formal positions, from which they can be voted out of by the rest of the population. Security, emergency response and similar matters are dealt with by part-time personnel who follow local leaders of proven competence. The system is very informal but in such a small community it works well enough, especially since major incidents will see potentially hundreds of friends, neighbours, co-workers and passers-by turning helping. The people of Gamma Pavonis V know that what affects one part of their small community affects everyone, so as a rule they show a strong community spirit.

There is little formal law on Gamma Pavonis V and a dispute that goes no further than a reasonably fair fistfight will attract little attention. A number of more or less self-appointed arbitrators exist, whose simple wisdom can resolve most matters if the parties involved are willing to listen. Those that are not willing to accept arbitration or who continue to cause problems are likely to be run out of town. This can mean being put on a passing starship if it is willing to take the individual but the locals are content to take a troublemaker to the edge of town and give him a date when he can return.

Being run out of town is potentially a death sentence for those that cannot find a place in one of the outlying settlements, most of which are unwilling to shelter someone who has proven too much trouble to be allowed to stay in the main hub. Most first time offenders are banished for a short duration. It is not uncommon to banish someone for a week and it is customary to give the person a sack containing five days' food and a few survival items. This sort of broad hint works for most people but a mechanism exists for dealing with inveterate troublemakers.

The system is fairly simple. The colonists are fairly well armed with hunting weapons such as rifles and shotguns and a few military firearms. If a banished person sets foot within the cleared area around any settlement from which they have been banished they are considered fair game. This usually means being run off at gunpoint but it is acceptable to shoot the person on sight. Anyone who is banished for more than a couple of weeks is effectively doomed to a slow death by starvation or perhaps a lonely existence as a wild hunter.

However, there is an alternative. Located about 50 kilometres from the main hub, the settlement of High Bruar serves as a sort of voluntary prison. Any banished person makes their way there will be given a place to sleep, one meal a day and the chance to work for additional items, such as more food and clothing. The banished person is required to surrender any weapons they have but can reclaim them and leave at any time to take their chances in the wilderness.

High Bruar is a mining town run by a small number of well-armed colonists who feed and house those with nowhere else to go. Those who are willing to work as miners, experts, administrators or in various support positions can live a comfortable life and some stay on long after their banishment period is over.

Banishment from High Bruar is effectively a death sentence unless the banished person can find a den of fellow criminals to join or support themselves by hunting. Occasionally an individual is considered too dangerous even to banish and is usually shot summarily by one of the self-appointed security experts.

As long as a majority of people either vote that the action was necessary or are not interested enough to vote such actions are considered lawful. This essentially means that sometimes a security operative will shoot someone down in the street and get away with it because not enough people care about it to censure the security operative. However, the system generally works in a ramshackle, rough and ready way.

Garfand's Pseudo-Rodent

Garfand's Pseudo-Rodent (or 'Geeper' from the initials of its name: GPR) is a marsupial that can grow to the size of a large cat or small dog. Geepers are social animals that live in packs of five to 30 individuals. They exhibit many of the characteristics of rats, including a penchant for stealing food and gnawing through pretty much anything.

Individual Geepers are not directly a threat to humans although a starving pack can bring down an animal the size of a large deer if they cooperate. Geepers commonly scavenge and take small prey. They will eat just about anything and breed quickly which can make them a threat to any ecosystem they enter. More importantly for humans, they can devastate crops and kill small food animals like chickens. In a sealed environment such as a rockball colony or starship they can cause immeasurable damage to wiring and other essential services.

The transportation of Geepers without a proper licence is highly illegal in most regions. Even where it is not, anyone who introduces Geepers into the local environment will find experience a lot of ill-feeling from the locals. However, Geepers are sufficiently intelligent to be trained to hunt other intrusive creatures. All licensed Geepers are sterilised except for the rigidly controlled breeding populations. Those allowed out in the field are fitted with a tracker collar that delivers a sharp electric shock when triggered. The Geeper is trained to run back to its carrying cage upon receiving a shock.

Geepers are thus useful in eliminating other pests but have to be carefully controlled. Many colonial administrations refuse to permit their use, preferring robotic pest control units instead. Those are not without their problems, of course, so Geepers remain in use in some areas.



EPISODE 2: GAMMA PAVONIS V

After cargo loading is completed, *Naddod* departs New Chryse Spaceport and enters jump bound for Gamma Pavonis V. The *Naddod* will travel from Beta Hydri subsector into Avanim subsector, taking 191 hours, 2 minutes and 24 seconds.

There is plenty to do during that period of nearly eight days. Routine ship operations, cleaning and maintenance, simulations, training and the occasional drill and also some care and maintenance on planetside equipment such as weapons and rough-terrain kits. Routine business takes the characters all over the ship but mainly around the main working and living spaces. The galley, lounge, bridge, equipment lockers and engineering spaces see frequent visits; areas like the airlocks, capture tanks and the cargo hold less so.

Which is why the smell is not noticed immediately.

SOMETHING ROTTING IN THE STATE OF DENMARK?

By the third day in jump, some of the crew might occasionally get a whiff of something unpleasant. John in particular wrinkles his nose occasionally, frowns in a puzzled manner and is seen looking or sniffing inside inspection hatches.

By day five, there is a distinct stench in some parts of the ship, a mix of rancid urine and something rotting, which could possibly be some exotic plastic melting or something similar. John is increasingly sure that there is something loose in his ship but since the last port of call had no wildlife, it seems highly unlikely that something has managed to get in. All the same, he urges everyone to be on the lookout for... whatever is making that smell.

During the next few hours, the characters will be exposed to an intermittent but increasingly bad smell, plus other evidence that there is something amiss. Objects may be knocked over, or simply missing. Shiny or edible items may mysteriously disappear or be found half-eaten. There is a skittering sound in the walls... or maybe that's just imagination.

The Referee is encouraged to play this scene for a mix of tension and mild comedy. Some characters may insist on scouring the corridors with elephant guns at the ready, while others are absolutely convinced that their sandwich was stolen by a greedy colleague who just left the wrapper in a stupid place. Gradually, as the characters get the odd fleeting glance of... something moving fast... out of the corner of their eye they should become convinced that there really is something loose in the ship.

Players being players, the characters will probably assume that there is a dangerous creature running around and will organise an armed-for-bear search that includes the air ducts and other confined and dark spaces.

They will find chewed wiring, stolen and stashed food, puddles of urine and droppings here and there and, at some point, some of the characters will be suddenly plunged into darkness as a hideous screech rings out.

In the seconds of confusion that follow, the characters will smell burning flesh, see something housecat sized scurrying away into the darkness and then be drenched by fire-suppression equipment as alarms ring out.

What has happened, of course, is that there really are creatures loose in the ship. They are mostly harmless but have a penchant for nibbling wiring. One has bitten through a cable and electrocuted itself, frightening its companion which is fleeing desperately. The fire is out in seconds and the emergency lights come on, revealing a smouldering carcass and a lot of tripped safety cut-outs.

Inspection shows that the carcass is a specimen of Garfand's Pseudo-Rodent, better known as a Geeper. It has chewed through a conduit and is very definitely dead. Its companion is not, however and there may be others loose in the ship. That might be bad; Geepers can gnaw through almost anything if motivated by hunger and fear.

Scientifically minded characters might decide to carry out an autopsy on the dead Geeper. If they do so, they will discover that it has no tracking/shock collar and has not been sterilised. The presence of a dead newborn Geeper in its pouch may also tip the characters off that they not only have a pseudo-rodent infestation but that they have illegal breeding stock aboard their ship.

The second Geeper also received a shock but not a very serious one. It responded as trained and fled back to its cage located in the cargo bay. This behaviour should convince the characters that the Geepers are being transported deliberately. Trained and uncollared but not neutered, Geepers suggests that someone wants to set up a breeding colony for commercial purposes.

Tracking the rogue Geeper back to its hideaway leads the characters to the cargo bay, where the stench of decaying flesh is now becoming very strong. The Geeper is found cowering in a hollow space in one of the cargo containers. It will make a break for it when the characters approach and will bite and scratch anyone attempting to stop it. Two or three others will also emerge and attempt to flee, creating chaos in the cargo bay.



The characters will need to hunt down and kill or capture the escaped Geepers and can investigate the cargo container. It was picked up at New Chryse and supposedly contains machinery spares bound for Gamma Pavonis V. About half the container does indeed have spares in it but there is a space created by internal walls, within which is a crude low berth that held about 35 Geepers.

Almost all of the Geepers are now dead and have been partially eaten by their surviving fellow travellers. Those that survived what appears to be a malfunction of the low berth unit have managed to tunnel their way out of the container through a weak area created by the conversion and at least some are loose on the ship.

John knows nothing about this and would never knowingly have a Geeper aboard his ship; the characters have already seen why. He insists on an immediate search for the remaining survivors, which need to be caught and/or killed before they disable life support or cause a jump drive malfunction and kill everyone aboard.

The characters will have to come up with a way to find and deal with the infestation, which could be comic or disastrous depending on their actions. It is possible that they will not find all of them, or only think they have and at some later time in the voyage a missing sandwich or skittering in the walls may provoke another maintenance-conduit safari.

Gamma Pavonis V

Assuming the characters do not somehow disable the ship or themselves dealing with the Geeper infestation, *Naddod* emerges at Gamma Pavonis V and receives permission to land from the orbital beacon. Despite having too much sea full of icebergs and distinctly rugged land, Gamma Pavonis V is a more welcoming world than the others visited so far. It has breathable air and the characters can go outside in just a thick sweater. To people who have been crawling around rodent-urine polluted maintenance ducts for three days, that seems pretty attractive.

As *Naddod* settles onto the landing pad, John gestures through the viewports at the distant ice-covered mountains and exclaims "*and we discovered Iceland!*" in a loud voice. He has been to Gamma Pavonis V a few times and likes it here. He has a few friends he wants to look up, so leaves Amber to deal with paperwork and heads into town as soon as he can. He does say that he intends to find out more about the doctored cargo container.

The local custom for weapons is a fairly typical frontier setup: you can own almost anything but what you carry is an issue. Out of town, in your home or on guard duty, it is acceptable to carry rifles and shotguns but on normal business a handgun is the most that would be expected. Anyone armed for a serious gunfight will attract attention, though it is likely that nobody will actually say anything unless the characters act suspiciously. Longarms are not permitted inside bars, shops and most other places of residence and business.

Amber and the characters will need to decide what to say about the Geeper container and who to. In theory they could end up in trouble for transporting the creatures, even inadvertently and it may seem easier to fix the container and pretend innocence than to explain that they had no part in what happened.

The freight bound for Gamma Pavonis V is listed on the manifest to be unloaded and transferred to a warehouse where it will be picked up by the recipient or shipped onward. This is normal; often the crew of a transport ship will have no contact with the cargo's recipient and may not even know who it is. This is the case here; they were contracted to deliver the cargo here and the recipient will arrive with the right paperwork to secure its release from the warehouse.

If the characters want to keep the suspect container aboard ship, they will have to engage in some bureaucratic skulduggery: the container is not theirs and there is a manifest saying it is to be unloaded here. Similarly, finding the end recipient will require either staking out the warehouse or finding out from the port authority (such as it is) who the cargo container belongs to. The characters might also simply fix the damage, offload it (with or without its deceased contents) and forget about the problem.

The recipient of the crate is a local businessman named Davis Essen, who has a small heavy fabrication works on the coast about 10 kilometres from the colony hub. His company makes seagoing vessels, trucks, machinery and spares for spacecraft and can hand-build small craft such as a ship's launch if they can get the technical components shipped in. Essen often buys and ships in salvaged components and has quite a selection of spares available at inflated prices.

Most of Essen's business is entirely legitimate and employs a couple of dozen loyal and hardworking staff. Recently he has begun diversifying into more questionable areas, including the illegal breeding of Greepers. He intends to use them to eliminate a number of pests that cause problems for local farmers, as well as dealing with various creatures that interfere with his own business. He is not a crime lord trying to destroy the local ecosystem for his own ends; he is merely a businessman who has made a rather bad choice.

Unfortunately, Davis Essen has a mean and arrogant streak and he is unlikely to forgive those that impede his plans. Although it is hardly the fault of the crew of *Naddod* that his Geeper-smuggling plan failed, Essen will blame them anyway.

Exactly what happens with Essen's cargo container depends on the characters' actions. Procedures are somewhat loose on Gamma Pavonis V but a container that leaves a trail of dead Greepers as it is moved to the warehouse will provoke a reaction, as will one that has obviously been tampered with.



If the container looks normal and/or the characters manage to fast-talk it past the very casual inspection by the cargo handlers, then Essen will take delivery of a container that turns out not to contain his animals (or not alive, anyway). If the characters withhold the container or it is impounded as suspect then he still will not get it.

Essen's response will not be immediate in either case. The characters may well decide that they have avoided any repercussions and be caught unprepared.

Repercussions and... More Repercussions

Once the characters have delivered their cargo, they are free to head into town and get some time away from the ship.

Fresh food is always a big draw, especially on a planet where there is a breathable atmosphere and proper farming; just seeing some different people is a bonus, too. Even if the characters are somehow not keen on recreation, they will have some business to attend to in town. The ship needs fresh supplies, there are cargoes to be sought and so forth. It seems likely that at some point the characters will head into town.

At a suitable moment, they are confronted by a group of local men and women who have taken a dislike to them. Davis Essen is smart enough not to just send his workers to pick a fight with the characters, so he has bribed some individuals who are not connected with his business. Their orders are to basically make a scene, try to provoke a fight and to make the off-worlders look like the bad guys. Essen does not really care whether his thugs win or lose; what matters is that the crew are seen assaulting some locals.

Consequently the characters will be taunted and shoved by locals who keep shouting things like 'what did you just call me?' and 'give it back!' as if the characters are thieves.

The situation will escalate as much as the characters allow it to. They may be able to retreat but they will more likely find themselves attracting attention from passers-by as they fend off aggressive and seemingly violent locals. A brawl will probably ensue and, if not, the thugs will keep trying to outrage the characters, for example by shoving a female character around or trying to drag her away from her companions. Of course, this will be covered by shouts that imply a domestic disturbance caused by the woman, so any intervention will look back on the characters' part.

Once a fight starts, it is only a matter of time before a group of armed locals arrives and demands surrender. They do not look like police, so there may be a standoff or worse. If the characters are forced to surrender or stop fighting to try to explain themselves, they are subject to snap judgement on the part of the local security people – courtesy of a bribe from Davis Essen.

Any characters who struck a blow or are implicated in some other way are summarily exiled from the town for a week. They are escorted to the edge of town at gunpoint, given a sack with food and supplies in it and bluntly informed that if they cross the line in the next week they're fair game for the riflemen who watch the edge of town for animal incursions. The characters are left their weapons and whatever tools they have on them but will be deprived of their communications equipment.

If the characters used weapons in the brawl or killed someone, they are permanently exiled and in extremely serious cases may simply be shot. It is best not to kill player-characters in this manner but then players should know better than to start murdering locals wherever they go.

The characters will find themselves at the edge of town, forbidden to re-enter for at least the time being and unable to contact the ship. Then they find that their traditional five-day ration of food has been swapped out for some empty wrappers and other rubbish; they have only one day's food.

Resolutions

John cannot simply come and pick up the characters in *Naddod*. The port is defended by a missile launcher and once he finds out what has happened it will be made clear to him that his ship will be fired upon if he tries to hop out and get his crew, assuming anyone aboard can fly the ship. Even if *Naddod* won that fight, exchanging fire with the spaceport is a good way to ensure that *Naddod* can never visit any civilised port again and may get the ship and crew on the 'known raider' lists. That's not a good place to be.

If the characters can get a fair distance from the town – say, about 150 kilometres into the mountains – then *Naddod* could take off as if leaving the planet and return in the mountains' radar shadow. Alternatively, the characters might be able to sneak back through the town to the port. That would be risky but it is possible for a clever group.

The third option is to wait out the banishment period. The characters are banished from the hub, not the other settlements, so it might be possible to hitch a ride on a truck or hike to an outlying settlement to spend a week there and then come back. Paying for passage, food and lodging depends on what the characters have on them, what work they can do, the bargains they can strike and so on.

The alternative is to try to survive in the rough by hunting. That is probably harder than the characters expect but if John finds out what is going on he may suddenly turn up to join them, angrily educating them how to fend for themselves in the wild. That will not be a pleasant week to live through but the characters could potentially learn a lot from John in this time.



By the time the banishment period ends, John or Amber should have sourced and very closely inspected a new cargo, refuelled and resupplied the ship and made ready to leave. The characters will be able to return to the port unless they have been banished for a long time, in which case a different plan will be necessary to get them back aboard the ship.

In the meantime, Davis Essen hatches the second part of his plan to take revenge on the characters. Having sent them into the outback where they are vulnerable, he sends a team of four of his more ruthless personnel to hunt the characters whilst they struggle to survive in the outback. Nobody would be surprised if a bunch of no-good off-worlders were stupid enough to get themselves lost or killed in the wilderness whilst banished for attacking locals. Any investigation would likely be short, if it happened at all, and there is nothing much to tie Essen to the attack.

These are not hardened killers and may be half-hearted at first about their hunt. That will change rapidly if the characters succeed in injuring or killing any of the hunters. The characters will have to elude, bribe, outfight, outsmart or hide from the hunters until they give up or the banishment period ends. Killing or injuring hunters outside the area around the town with no witnesses is unlikely to have repercussions but the characters may not work that out.

It is possible that the characters might have all manner of other adventures in the wilds of Gamma Pavonis V but at some point they will be ready to leave the planet. Whether they are picked up by *Naddod* or return to the spaceport, they will eventually return aboard and prepare to leave Gamma Pavonis V.

John may be hard to live with for a while and then there's that strange noise behind the bulkhead to consider...

OPPOSITION

Geeper

Str 2 (+0) **Dex** 4 (+0) **End** 2 (+0)

3 kg omnivore/hunter

Skills: Athletics 1, Survival 1, Recon 0, Melee (Natural Weapons) 0.

Weapons: Teeth (1d6 damage) Armour 0.

Essen's Thugs

Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 7 (+0) **End** 7 (+0)
Int 6 (+0) **Edu** 6 (+0) **Soc** 5 (-1)

Skills: Melee Combat (unarmed) 1, Melee Combat (Bludgeon) 1.

Weapons: Unarmed (1d6), improvised blunt weapon (2d6-2).

Security Volunteers

Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 8 (+0) **End** 7 (+0)
Int 7 (+0) **Edu** 7 (+0) **Soc** 8 (+0)

Skills: Gun Combat (Slug Pistol, SMG or Shotgun) 2, Melee (Bludgeon) 1.

Weapons: Baton (2d6 damage), Auto Pistol (3d6-3 damage) plus Shotgun (4d6) or Submachine Gun (3d6-3).

Essen's Hunters

Str 7 (+0) **Dex** 9 (+1) **End** 8 (+0)
Int 8 (+0) **Edu** 7 (+0) **Soc** 5 (-1)

Skills: Recon 2, Gun Combat (Rifle or Shotgun) 1, Stealth 1.

Weapons: Knife (1d6+2), Rifle (3d6) or shotgun (4d6).

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