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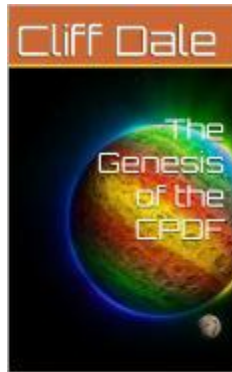
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The Genesis of the CPDF

(Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force)

The 2nd book in the Capsaa Series

By Cliff Dale



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DEDICATION

*Thanks, Caroline, for putting up with the silence
and for still putting up with me, it is much appreciated.*

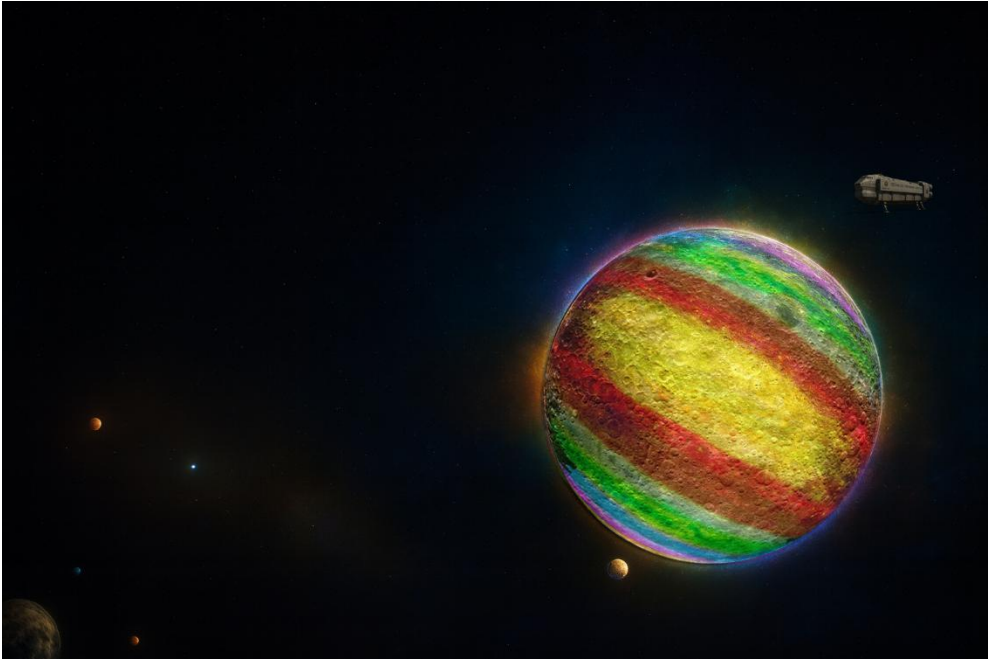
*For Phil, once again, thanks for the graphics,
and lending an ear to listen to hours of reading,
for the time spent on the reworking and the rewrites,
and for suggestions when things do not sound quite right.*

*and like every good boy should, last but not least, thanks Mum
lost somewhere on planet dementia, nestled in her own EPS,
last seen fighting the raiders of the lost mind
and hearing loud whispers from the Darkness in the Deep.
Sadly, a battle lost, her colours lowered but not tarnished.*

CGD

CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – Genesis	Page 1
Chapter 2 – Formation	Page 17
Chapter 3 – Early Days	Page 31
Chapter 4 – First Blood	Page 45
Chapter 5 – Round Two	Page 63
Chapter 6 – Quiet Before the Storm	Page 82
Chapter 7 – A Silence Shattered	Page 101
Chapter 8 – What Next?	Page 124
Chapter 9 – Storm Warning	Page 146
Chapter 10 – Storm Force	Page 164
Chapter 11 – Relentless	Page 178
Chapter 12 – Relief	Page 205
Glossary	Page 232
About the Author	Page 236
Other Titles	Page 238



1. Genesis

It became clear that something needed to be done, and it was turning out to be glaringly obvious that they were going to have to do this themselves; what “they” needed was organisation. At the end of the day, it was their ass on the line, and they needed to protect it; if they did not, then they were going to get it kicked all around this planet. The latest few incidents had gone some way to prove that a kicking was likely to happen more frequently.

There were obstacles to this ‘organising’, funding was just one of them; sixty thousand individual plots were another significant issue, which was perhaps the biggest obstacle to be overcome.

The planet was just seven years into its occupancy by the multitude of mining companies that operated on a plot here, and until recently, not one Raider had made it in one piece to the surface of Capsaa.

In that moment of genesis, the Raiders had tried, but in the early days, there was protection provided by the Conglomerate that owned the operating rights

to the planet, the PRMC, known simply by its acronym of SAA-GC. It had a need to protect the investment they were making on the striped planet of Capsaa, and that investment was considerable; still, they stood to make a humongous profit for their outlay by dividing the surface into sixty thousand working plots. They had managed to sell almost all of the plots, recovering way more than their expenditure, and with the residual income from the supply of power, air, water, and food, they stood to make a lot more for as long as the plots were occupied.

The plots varied in size, but at present, not all the plots were working; they may have been purchased, but the planet of Capsaa was off the beaten track, so to speak. The nearest commercial Staging Station, SS193, was several jumps away in the Warp Tunnels, something not for the faint of heart, and it had no security of its own to provide assistance. At best, it was seventy days away, an ageing remote space station that linked several of the nearby planets to a sales point, and it did not want to get involved in pirate encounters.

The first incident on Capsaa should have prompted the Product Rights Management Holders to the fact that armed protection was necessary, but the response from the community was not favourable.

There were many individual miners on Capsaa, the OMBs, as they were known, the One Man Bands, and of course, there were well-established Companies that had purchased a far bigger plot; all had the exclusive option to extract whatever product was in the area they had agreed the mining rights to, all were a PRMH.

A Product Rights Management Holder had certain responsibilities, and security of their own plot was one of them. The Planets' owners, in this case, represented by the PRMT based in the orbiting Space Administration Station, had offloaded most of that responsibility to the PRMH as part of the terms of the purchase contract.

Whilst they were all in agreement that some level of armed protection was required, the PRMH and the PRMT each disagreed that they had to fund it. For its part, the collection of Rights Holders had at least decided on what was missing, and that was some kind of a collective association, what they needed was a union or cooperative of those individual Rights Holders, they wanted something or someone, that was going to speak for them all, and it would have to work for them all too, no matter if the PRMH was large or small.

What they were up against was written into all the PRMH contracts; it was made perfectly clear that they were individually responsible for their security concerns. The PRMT, the Product Rights Management Team, were safe in

their Space Station, and they had their own inbuilt protection already; they were sorted.

It was pointed out to anyone who enquired about security defences for the surface dwellers, that the PRMT were not able to supply this service using what they had available, nor were they contracted to; they simply could not help. The Rights Holders had concluded that they were going to be left to look after their own interests, and the parent companies, those that had them, had told their employees that they were not going to provide this security protection, the Head Office had already decided, that, individually at least, it was not worth the expense, collectively, well, perhaps they could offer something if everyone would share in the overall costs, but it was proving difficult to organise. Again, it came back to logistics; most of these Mining Company Offices were light-years apart, communication was notoriously slow, and it was also expensive, which was one reason that this collective idea did not get far. Perhaps, the major issue for all of these parent organisations was the mistrust in any potential 'Planetary Association' to oversee the funds they would need to supply; they were not going to throw funding into anyone's bottomless pocket without some accountability, they wanted someone they could have a go at if the Coin went missing.

It was not a very responsible way for any parent organisation to treat their staff, nor to deal with the protection of their considerable time and the expense they had already incurred in the setting up of the operation on the surface of Capsaa. Many of these companies had a vast amount invested in the infrastructure on the plot they had purchased the mining rights to, and that plot purchase was a high enough cost.

It was true that you never owned the land your investment was sat on, though a plot on Capsaa was worth the outlay in the long haul, the security side of things was an extra you did not often have to consider, so they had not wanted to in the beginning, and they did not want to now.

For them, the parent Company Head Office, safe in some faraway Space Station, it was simple mathematics; there were going to be sixty thousand plots, what were the chances that their "one" was going to be a target?

There was some credibility to their logic in that the place was loaded with product, there were plenty of other potential targets, and many were bigger and had more value, so they assumed the risk to their plot was minimal. Eventually, though, the maths would work against them.

The OMBs were fairly safe; they had little to offer a Raider, but the bigger boys, well, their sites were laden with a high-value product and that made them a bigger and better target. If you were in early to the planet of Capsaa, then all

you needed to do was pick up the product off the surface; it was that abundant, it really was that simple, just scoop and pack, but that also meant full storerooms more often, it was a bigger temptation to those intent on stealing another's hard worked for harvest.

The mid-sized companies were now quite nervous, they had plenty of product on offer, and they had fewer staff and resources to defend their installations, and as many ran on lower operating margins, they could not afford some form of private security service, this type of thing was proper expensive, and whilst profits were acceptable, they did not want to lower them further on an expense that would, in all probability, never be used.

The OMBs did not see what all the fuss was about; they had their single-occupancy Habitat pod, a small storage compound, and little else. They were happy to let the others defend their bigger plots; the assumption was that the Raiders would eventually be put off coming at all. So far, the Raiders had picked on the bigger guys, but they were getting bolder with each incursion, and if something was not done, and done soon, it could soon turn into a free-for-all. The OMBs could see that at some point they would be the easier target; they would be right in the firing line from the smaller raiding groups rather than the bigger, more organised lot. These Raiders were the ones giving the PRMH the grief at the moment. Many of the OMBs were sure it was only going to increase in frequency and probably, in severity too.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that many things, officialdom, in particular, were reduced to acronyms, and to the abbreviations that made up the names, some were confusing, you had the PRMC, H, and T, Company, Holder and Team, others were just made up like the OMB, the one man band, it was referred to as short-squawk, and even this was shortened on occasion to just squawk.

Time was another one of those squawks; in many places, it ran to the local time of the planet, how long it revolved around its Sol, or sometimes more than one sun. Capsaa ran on a form of STU, Standard Terran Units, minutes, hours and days. They simply adjusted the number of hours in the day to fit in with the revolution of the planet; the Sol R, it worked.

Capsaa was a new planet, or at least the mining part of it was new; it was a purely by-chance discovery when the DERV Capsaa came across this pretty little striped planet with its five moons and its many bucketloads of varied product. There were all sorts of riches here, minerals as big as your helmet littered the surface, there were ores in high purity in immense veins, and there were vast pools of liquid gases at the frozen poles, and smaller pools dotted about in several of the other rings, and even many of the rocks had value.

As you flew in toward the planet and zipped down from top to bottom, you got no indication of the riches that were here; instead, you marvelled at the multitude of colours on display that made up the well-defined rings of the planet's surface.

It started with whitish poles at the top and the bottom, frozen water and super-cold liquid gas pools, next to each end was a pale brown stripe of the tundra region, this merged into the purple ring, then a deep blue one, when coming up from the bottom pole, this deep blue appeared as a faded, paler, blue, but next to both of the blue rings would be a deep green layer, full of lush grasses, moss-covered rocks and odd small-flowered plants giving it a verdant colour. Next, it all merged into a dull but light grey ring. This was rocky and sparse but still rich in resources. Then, you gazed upon the darker brown ring, and you just knew it would be baked hard and dry. There was a fiery red ring that followed, that immediately got your attention, showing that the planet was still volcanically active, but somehow, it seemed serene, not quite gentle, but not so harsh either. Once you entered this ring, though, you knew your preconceptions were wrong. That just left the central ring, the one that joined the two striped halves together, the biggest band of all was the yellow equatorial ring, sand-like, mainly dry as anything, but also rich in resources that could not be ignored, you needed extra caution here though, the soil was loose, not cohesive, a person could easily sink into it and quickly disappear from view. If you had purchased a plot in this yellow ring, then it required an extra expense too; it was not possible to build anything here, so any storage facility and living space were typically in the grey ring.

The whole planet was a gold mine of product, and yes, gold was also here in abundance, but it was not the most sought-after product, that would be the liquid Argon that bubbled and burbled at the surface in several of the rings, just waiting for someone to slurp it up and shunt it off to a Galaxy hungry for the stuff to feed its Ion power drives.

Capsaa was an odd place in many respects, not just because of the coloured stripes. One thing was that there had never been any indigenous population on its surface; it had never had life of that sort on its soil until mankind turned up and invaded. It did have a few plants, though, mainly basic grasses, and there were some flowering things here and there, but these plants did not bear fruit, as there was nothing on the surface to eat them; nature did not use this method to reseed the genus. There were no trees either; a few of the basic plants had large, broad leaves, but they were not tree-like, and oddly, there were no insects, there were no pollinators, nature on Capsaa had found another way.

Geology-wise, there were no hills, no mountains, the place was essentially flat, sure there was the odd rise where the winds had whipped up a mound or two, but the closest thing to a hill was the twenty-metre rise where the red ring bumped shoulders with the central yellow one, otherwise, the only bits sticking up were the granite rock towers that stretched a mere three or four metres at best, and there were sulphur cones nearer to the central rings, though half of these had already fallen over. It really was quite an odd little striped planet, about two-thirds the size of the Terran home world, the standard measure for these things.

Oh yes, it had water too, but it did not rain, that was another oddity, that, and the one big sea that went from the top to the bottom like a huge lake, frozen at the poles, very shallow through the centre, and not very deep anywhere else. To go around the equator of the planet's surface was not possible without some sort of floating vessel. This Capsaanic Sea really did split the planet; it was certainly shallow in the yellow ring, but it was still too deep to wade through. The water was passable, though it was high in mineral content, and sadly, it did not smell too good, the content made the water taste absolutely foul, but after double-filtering, it was perfectly drinkable.

The other bonus was air; it was breathable, just, it had all the right components to make it passable for the humans now crawling all over its surface, it was just not in the right proportions. You could easily breathe it in for a few hours, right until the odd levels of the not-so-good bits would take effect, and you keeled over. If you did not get help soon after that event, then sadly, death was likely in around another three to four hours. Capsaa did not always play nice. The planet was of a decent size, and similar to the Terran home world, it had a natural gravity measured at point nine on the gravity index, which made it an easy place to work in, though it did have its sporadic storms to contend with when the moons passed close enough to ruffle the surface; occasionally, they did this rather strongly.

The planet's discovery was painful, and its naming was in honour of the fallen crew who never got to see it, nor share in the bounty it offered.

The Deep Exploration Research Vessel Capsaa had a simple task: discover new planets for its parent company, and get paid a discovery bonus based on the value of the product found upon it. The DERV Capsaa was struggling to find anything of any value. They had discovered other new planets, and they had shared small bounties from these, but that big one was proving hard to find; they had been looking for that needle in the cosmic haystack and just could not detect it. It was remaining elusive. They had tried all sorts to bring a change in luck; they shifted their astral location again and again, and then entered the

cosmic equatorial plane, aiming at the constellation known as Apparatus Sculptoris, the Sculptors Studio. They were destined to pass through Aquarius and appear somewhere around the south-eastern edge of the constellation, near its conjunction with Phoenix, which was when it all turned sour.

The DERV was mugged by a forty-strong contingent of what could only be described as Pirates, intent on stealing a cargo that the DERV just did not have. The Captain, Ryan Scott, tried pleading their case, and he warned that they were prepared to defend themselves. Soon, their resolve was put to the test as the Pirates managed to pick apart the shielding and land three ships on the hull. Inevitably, each of these ships was there to force a hull breach, and a neat plasma laser cut hole later, saw three squads of insurgents inside the ship. These intruders were eventually repelled by the DERV crew, but the cost was unacceptably high.

The DERV managed to escape, and an EJM procedure was invoked, but the skirmish damage to the ship saw its drive couplings fail, and the Emergency Jump Mode came to a floundering end. The HyperDrive tunnel they were travelling in collapsed, and they were spat out into space once more, this time, unpowered and spinning uncontrollably. It took four days to recover engine power, and by then, the grim totals had already been revealed: one hundred and fourteen dead, and of the one hundred and ninety-eight survivors, most had sustained an injury of some sort.

They were lucky, though; they had been drifting without steering, without any form of braking capability, and they were heading toward an unknown planet and an uncontrolled entry into its atmosphere. They were unlikely to survive that. Had engine power not been restored in the nick of time, then the planet, now named Capsaa in honour of those lost, would have seen the DERV become another stain on the already colourful landscape.

It was fortunate, fated perhaps, that whilst waiting for the repair ships to bring more hull plating and bigger tools, they passed the time by testing the repaired scanning array on the nearest object, the planet below them.

The results of that scan were astonishing.

So, the planet was discovered, the ship recovered, sort of, and the surviving crew who found it were eventually made rich on payment of the discovery bonus from the planet, and the Product Rights Management Company set about marketing this place for mining.

It was an easy sell for the dedicated team; there was so much product per square metre that they could have sold ten-metre plots, and everyone would still be rich in a matter of weeks. It really was that good.

Colonisation was not an option, although the planet had a suitable atmospheric pressure, water, and air, it was not safe to build the softer accommodation domes required for a population to live in. Four of the five moons would occasionally pass really close, and the resulting winds whipped up the surface, sandblasting everything in beautiful, coloured dust storms, and the electrical storms, well, they were dazzlingly spectacular as long as you were not in one, so a simple mining planet it became.

The only moon not to pass close by was Hazelium. This was already stuck to the planet, moored to the southern pole, and neither planet nor moon could let the other one go; they had become a permanent fixture.

Hazelium was also the final resting place of the one hundred and fourteen who had perished.

It took a while to get the planet ready for the invasion of people, there was infrastructure to build, power generators, a multitude of food production facilities, and a scattering of water purification plants, and they would have need of product storage in a secure Space Port, it all took time to prepare, and once it was up and running, then the influx could begin.

Fifty percent of the plots were sold before a building had been erected, and now, the PRMT had sold almost all of the rest of them, though not all plots were yet occupied. The distances some people wanted to travel were mind-boggling; some were coming from one hundred and sixty or so light-years distant, which took time, and when you were bringing in freighters full of equipment, then time just seemed to drag on for quite some while.

Time was a relative thing; essentially, there were two measurements, real-time and Warp time. Real-time was always measured in STUs, the Standard Terran Units, basically minutes, hours, days, and years. Warp time was odd; it was not consistent, and it varied depending on the tunnel and how fast you could travel through it. What often seemed like weeks in the tunnels would be months on the outside, and many months in the tunnels could be years passed in the real-time framework, your time, you always measured in real-time; it made it hard to work out when you were, never mind where you were.

The DERV Capsaa was given over to a new purpose. The days of exploration were no more, although made to be perfectly habitable again, it was just not usable as a travel ship anymore, it had been too badly broken to survive the stresses of Warp travel.

The DERV had already been renamed, or at least its title had changed, now it was a sass, perhaps more correctly titled as S A S, without squawk, it was a Space Administration Station, but the old ship did not mind, at least it was not reduced to scrap or left abandoned to its fate in the Warp somewhere, destined

to become one of the ghostly space hulks that turned up occasionally, often unannounced, and generally, unwelcome.

The Ship had been repaired to make it structurally stable; it had also been stripped of all its old scientific detection equipment, and now, it was home to another three hundred souls.

Some of these people were selling the plots or administering the Rights to them, others were maintenance crew for the water and power plants, and there were those whose job it was to harvest and package the food grown on the planet, though much of this was an automated process; and many of the packers lived on the surface near the production facilities.

Food on Capsaa was good, good in the fact that there was some. Any off-planet food supply source was somewhere in the region of seventy days away, so a local, freshly grown supply was a sensible option, and of course, it was another of those additional sources of revenue for the PRMC.

It was some years after construction had begun that the first of the mining operators moved on to the planet. Initially, it was the big boys; they wanted the first look at this place, and being in need of larger bases, they needed more exclusivity to the Space Port in particular.

They got their way and used the facilities at hand, and it worked well.

Eventually, more Ports were built; right now, there were six of them, and all were still busy, though, at present, it was mainly goods out; in the early days, it was nearly all goods in.

Within five years, the smaller mining units were coming in, and the OMBs were plugging away too. From there, it did not take long before the word was out; this place was now just ripe for the plundering. It had not gone unnoticed by those intent on thievery that the infrastructure projects were now completed, and more importantly, the heavily armed protection, the APVs, had all moved out.

Why was this such a notable thing, you may ask?

Well, whilst the owners of the Planet were busy building all the required power and water facilities, all the food growing ponds, the Space Ports even, the crews and ships that were here for this purpose had a degree of protection, there were no ground troops, they did not need those, Armoured Protection Vessels operated, they picked off anyone that dared to infringe on any company property. All of these incidents occurred just outside of the atmospheric bubble that surrounded the planet of Capsaa. No Raider had ever made it to the surface in one piece; now, that fact had significantly changed.

A single Armoured Protection Vessel was not to be trifled with, and in the early days, there were six of them protecting the Property Rights Management

Company assets. The SAA was a vast Galactic Conglomerate already, and this PRMC knew the value of protecting its investment.

Once the infrastructure projects had ceased, and the planet was deemed to be self-sufficient in fuel, water and food, then things changed. There was no need for the PRMC to send more shipping to deliver goods and materials for construction projects, so the APVs were withdrawn. The PRMT advised those on the ground, the Property Rights Management Holders, that, as of now, they were responsible for their own security as per the agreed contract.

There were still regular container shipments of the technical supplies required for new construction projects; not all the plots were occupied, so there was still a regular influx of planetary newbies. The smaller companies generally brought in their own materials and hooked into the infrastructure already in place for their plot.

To begin with, this was not an issue; no one bothered those on the ground, and for a while, no one really bothered those who left the surface fully laden with the product harvested from Capsaa either; everything just ticked along all nice and quietly, all pleasant and correct.

Now, something had changed.

There was no precise, detailed information on what actually happened, but it seemed there was a gradual realisation that attacking random shipping and hoping to pick on one that had any product you wanted was too haphazard. Of course, you may not survive long enough to steal it anyway, and you may not have brought the right equipment to safely store what the hijacked ship had to offer. Another frequent problem was that you may not find a buyer to sell this stolen product to, either.

Transport shipping was not the most sensible choice of target anymore; there was a better option.

The Pirates had worked out that it was possible to pick a target that harvested a specific product that you could steal; it was far less hazardous than raiding something probably armed in some busy, possibly APV patrolled, shipping lane, and you could sell the stolen product to a pre-arranged buyer. Of course, all these targets were easily accessible on the surface of Capsaa, plus they were most likely unguarded.

That is when it all started to go wrong for the Rights Holders; that is also when these discussions about security were forced upon those who did not want to deal with it. It was also the moment the community on the surface realised that they were left out in the cold by their employers, and if they could not sort themselves out, then some of them were not going to survive the full term of their employment contracts.

Any surface mining was notoriously tough; it was a hazardous occupation, and at times, it was downright dangerous, but you knew those risks when you signed up. You were given hazard pay to cover those possibilities, as to Pirates, well, they were never mentioned in the employment interview.

There were still no community facilities on the planet. As mentioned, it was not open to colonisation; it was essentially one huge mine, worked by hundreds of companies, in fact, tens of thousands of them, some of which were individuals who had spent all their available funds just to get here.

It was some trek; the nearest Star Port was a Staging Station, designated simply as SS193. It was, on average, a seventy-day trip done in several jumps that were both long and frequently boring.

The Transports in from SS193 were generally unmolested, the Transports out, particularly the freighters, recently, were coming into contact with unfriendly forces out in the deep, and it had nothing to do with the dark menace that haunted the Warp Tunnels looking for souls to infect and corrupt; they often encountered that and had learnt to combat it.

It seemed these Raiders were becoming bolder, getting ever closer to the planet itself, until eventually, they did what they had been threatening to do for some time: they made landfall and stole product directly from the surface.

It was the logical move; any hijacking in space came with risks, some freighters had defences, and some had other vessels in support capable of a defensive posture, so any defence capability was likely to be amplified. There was also the chance of a collision, either in the Tunnel or in the event that was a hijacking, there was even the danger of coming in too hard and destroying the freighter altogether. The product was then potentially lost to space in the resulting debris, and it became doubly difficult to recover and sell.

On the ground, it was light defences; if indeed there were any at all, they had almost no risk of collision, and there was no need to come in hard anywhere; all they needed to do was threaten loudly, load up what they wanted, and the bonus was that there should be no expensive munitions to purchase or replace either, an extra bonus.

Now, the Product Rights Management Holders knew they needed to organise; they needed an organiser too. The problem was that no one wanted to take the lead on this; no one wanted to invest the time.

Although they all had communication equipment to talk to their nearest neighbours, a sensible safety precaution, there was not a wider network to inform everyone of an ongoing incident; that feature was becoming so necessary now that the planet had been raided with no resistance offered. The PRMH, as a collective, were all well aware that once that fact became widely

known, Capsaa was a soft target; then infiltration and confrontation were bound to happen more often; they, as a collective, needed to plug this gap. It was obvious they needed to create some sort of defence strategy, because now, they had none at all; they had left themselves wide open to anyone who cared to plunder their facilities, any facility, large or small. There was no one out there to stop the Raiders from taking anything they wanted. An added stumbling block was this wider communication issue; there was no planet-wide equipment in place, so they needed to get some, which took funds, effort, and organisation, which took time, and that meant time and Coin were taken from productivity, and inevitably, from profit.

There was the all-seeing eye of Capsaa Station, but that was not its function. Whilst it could see incoming Raiders and was able to report their location and possible landing sites, there was no one to whom they should report these facts, no one to repel any incursion, and that is precisely the part that needed sorting out. All the Rights Holders wanted a solution, but what they chose to see was that someone needed to fund this project, had to provide staff for it, and someone needed to get the resources and the equipment necessary to provide a defensive capability. Unfortunately, they all decided it did not have to be them.

Even though the bigger companies could afford it, and they could even provide their own security forces had they a mind to, still, they were unwilling. The smaller companies needed to, but they did not have the funding or resources to initiate such a project, so they waited too, sure that someone else would be the one to kickstart the project. That left the OMBs; they were sure no one was going to attack them, they were too small to bother with, so they just ignored the problem completely. They decided they were too insignificant to warrant consideration of the hijacking of their product; it was never going to be 'their' problem to deal with.

Unsurprisingly, nothing got done; then a second raid took place, more product was plundered, and now people had been killed. There was a new will to get the ball rolling, but still, it was slowed by disagreement and the dysfunction of those who needed the protection.

Placed carefully in the gaze of the Moon of Hazelium was the one-time wreck that was serving as the distribution centre for the planet, the former DERV Capsaa. It was currently part admin, part hotel, and its primary function was in the sales of mining rights plots on the surface. The Product Rights Management Team were no threat to anyone; there was no Coin on board, no cargo, and those intent on robbery knew the Station was there, knew it held nothing of interest. They also knew it had quite a sting in its tail should it be

unleashed; it had its own defensive capabilities, a battery of Free Electron Laser Turrets on its hull.

The company that operated the newly repurposed Space Administration Station Capsaa had already repaired the old Deep Exploration Research Vessel at some considerable expense. Thankfully, this included the turret defence system on its hull, so the Raiders wisely left it alone.

The repair/repurpose deal was part of the agreement reached with the original crew members when they were paid off for the discovery bonus for this remarkable planet, simply put, the deal both sides had entered into meant that the ship would be repaired to a good standard and used for the company benefit, and it was to remain as a memorial to the lost crew members of the firefight they had with the Pirates at the very genesis of Capsaa. Those who purchased a plot were told it was this tragic event that led to the fortuitous discovery of the planet, and, as a result of the loss of so many of those crew members, it was from their spilt blood that the PRMH were able to reap their profits. It was hoped that there would not be a need to spill any more.

The old, battered ship had been repaired, and it was re-armed, it was revived, and now, given a new lease of life, it was having to try and sort out the mess various PRMHs were creating in this simple decision-making process. It was clear that there was no hard choice to make, only a logical one. Whilst the Product Rights Management Company had made it clear in the terms and conditions of a plot purchase, reiterating that each PRMH was responsible for their security measures both on the ground and when the Transports left the surface, they could now see, individually, that it would be a difficult thing to provide. They had conceded that they would have to contribute the necessary time, effort, and resources to assist in the setting up of a collective defence force; it was in everyone's interests, including their own. The fact that they still had around a quarter of the available plots left to fill, apparently, did not enter into this decision-making process. Once this Defence Force was established, and it had to be, the PRMC wanted the Product Rights Management Holders, those that had purchased any size of Mining Plot, to continue with its organisation and contribute to its funding; they argued that once set up, it would not take much expenditure to keep it going. Of course, it was not going to be an easy task; what they needed to do was to organise the various groups into some sort of warning alarm system and get them to provide the actual fighting force personnel that would defend all the planet's installations. Once more, the PRMC had to concede that many of the planet's systems of power, water purification and food production actually belonged to themselves, and although they were not going to provide a defence force to protect those

installations specifically, there were hundreds of them, they did need some level of protection. So, after much prodding and cajoling from the PRMT, the SAA-GCs' eyes and ears on the planet, they came up with a simple solution that they hoped would suit everyone in the long term. They had now agreed to provide the organisational resources and associated staffing at zero cost to the PRMH; all this would be housed in the recently designated Capsaa Station, but the defence force to be formed would also provide planetary protection for all of the PRMC facilities, too. It seemed a simple deal, one that benefited everyone in the long-term; all it needed was approval from the mining companies, there were some forty-four and a half thousand of them at the moment, and that took a lot of organising in itself.

There was still plenty of work to do to actually get this idea off the ground, but it did make sense, and eventually, it would have to be an addendum to the mining rights agreement contract. The new clause would see the PRMH adding to the defence force and providing some funding for weapons and training. It had not escaped the PRMC's notice that they were getting the better deal here; any defence force was a considerable expense, so to get one for free, or at just the cost of room space and a few staff members, was a considerable saving.

They had initially provided a few small attack craft to protect their fleet vessels bringing in the construction materials and equipment, but these had more or less stopped now. It was shortly after these had left the vicinity that the first attack took place. Now, the APVs only arrived with the Cargo Container vessels once every few months, when new installations on the ground needed equipping. These APVs would complete short patrols whilst the CC vessels were unloaded, mainly to pass the time and relieve the crew's boredom, but as soon as they were ready for the return trip, the Armoured Protection Vehicles were withdrawn as a patrol feature, then the PRMH were on their own once again.

The SAS Capsaa could use the various relay buoys to monitor for unauthorised shipping movement, but it was not in any position to attack it; it was not its function nor its duty.

The first raiding party came out of nowhere; there was no exploratory foray onto Capsaa, just a full-on assault and the pillaging of product, in and out before anyone knew what had happened.

It was a day like any other; the sun came up, crews ventured onto the surface to begin mining, and the product collected provided a profit after processing. Today was going to end differently for five Rights Holders; it was going to cost them Coin, not make it.

The Raiders came in behind the moon of Paulinius as it came in on a close pass to the planet Capsaa, this event always interfered with the static monitoring systems of the TRBs, it gave a ghosting to the displays, all the operator could see were hazy images on the monitors, the sensory information fading in and out, leaving you unsure whether you saw something or not.

As the largest of Capsaa's moons got to its closest point, 'they' peeled out from its blindside, and electronically hidden from Capsaa Station, they managed to make planetfall in the blue-ringed part, near Sector 365. All they did was place two well-armed Gunships above the processing facilities of the five targets they had chosen. At each one, they would land a few Transports and some heavily armed ground troops, and then they proceeded to plunder an already refined product.

They chose their targets well, big enough to have decent storage facilities, small enough to handle the volume of staff on the site, and they were off the surface again in under three standard hours, the only casualties being damaged communication antennas, and the now emptied storage tanks and rooms.

This first incursion to the surface was a classic bullying tactic: get in fast, threaten loudly, but do not engage, plunder all you can find, and then leave without firing a shot or breaking a sweat. Now, the only concern that remained would be some sort of military intervention from a naval defence force or perhaps a private contractor. The insurgents had done their research; they already knew there were none. The Raiders were perhaps not sure what volume of product they would collect, but they knew their targets well enough to know what type was there, and the buyers were already lined up just waiting for confirmation of the volumes of that stolen product to be sold.

For this particular group, it was the best raid they had ever done. There were no casualties; they were under no threat at any time. It was possible to actually take their time and not have to worry that the cavalry was going to charge in unannounced and try to carve them up. This raid was a pleasure to be part of. Some of their number missed that thrill of excitement though; they liked that feeling of being on the edge, missing the exhilaration of a threat from an armed adversary. They needed to be scared; they liked it, and although there was joy, a satisfaction to escaping with their sorry hide still attached to the rest of their body, for some, this soft-touch theft left a lot to be desired, but they would not argue with the payment bonus; that was the real clincher in all of this.

Then, of course, the greed kicks in. We did it once, when can we do it again? Word got around the planet, people did talk to each other, and those others talked to more people, and they talked, and so it went on, and still there was no collective news system, no warning or reporting procedure was in place at this

time, so, there was perhaps a shrug of the shoulders and a sense of “at least it did not happen to us”, and it was left at that.

Those companies that suffered a loss just wrote it off as an unfortunate incident, still not worthy of the investment of a defence force; it was, after all, a one-off.

For its part, Capsaa Station did eventually get to hear the rumours, but even so, there was no official notification or complaint from those who suffered a loss, and all this was some three months after the attacks took place. Of course, by this time, there was nothing that could be done anyway, but a report was submitted to HQ, and a NoFAR report was filed as required by regulations, ‘No Further Action Required.’

Sometime later, a second incident was reported, this one was much more disturbing; it was a different group, and these were smaller in number too, but they were ruthless right from the very start. They chose to hit just the one PRMH site, a big one, and they were brutally efficient; they targeted the second-largest producer of refined Argon on the surface.

Once more, nine Pirate vessels sneaked in behind a moon, this time it was Daleium, and using the sub-satellite of Ryanoris as further cover, they dived for the processing plant on the fringes of the white ring at the Northern Pole, arriving en masse to storm the production facility and steal seven tankers’ worth of liquid Argon. In each tanker were just five heavily armed Pirates. They had stormed the compound, the small compact groups waving their weapons at the scared staff running around trying to avoid confrontation, but it did not stop the Raiders from letting rip at several of those who fled. This raiding group encountered no armed resistance, not even unarmed resistance. Sadly, it did not prevent them from brutally murdering twenty-six of the staff that worked there, it seemed, for no reason other than they enjoyed it.

Those observations were made by those who had survived, and their opinion would obviously be biased, but it was a fact that there was a sad cost to this simple theft; nearly all of those killed were trying to get away, and it was true that they offered no threat, but it did not matter for the raiding party; life was cheap. Most of the time, they did not value their own lives that highly; if they survived an encounter with a target and escaped with no extra holes in them, then it was a bonus. Should a few fellow insurgents get tagged in a firefight, well, of course, they would be missed, but their share of the bounty would be evenly distributed amongst the survivors; that meant more for the individual. It made any loss more agreeable, not such a bad thing; they cared little for sentiment, and friends were a luxury they did not need.

This group left almost as quickly as they appeared, and they subsequently escaped unmolested with their prize. It was suggested that it was this incident in particular that set off a series of events that would finally see the formation of the long-awaited Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force, the CPDF.

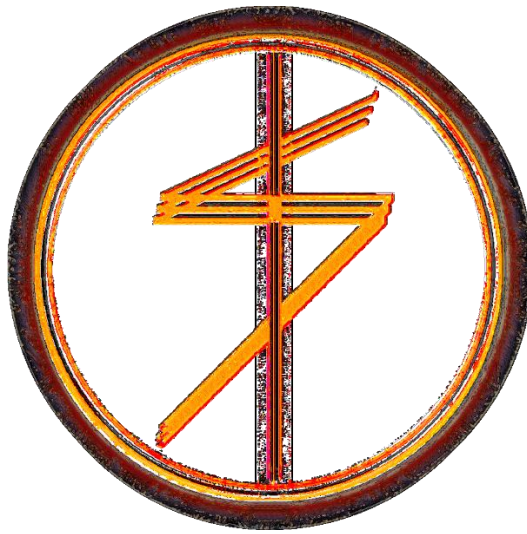
For the dead, it was already too late.

For the living, it was to be welcomed.

For the PRMH, it was an expense yet to be determined.

For the Raiders, at present, it was nothing more than an unknown.

This incident also forced the SAS Capsaa to redefine the difference between a Raider and a Pirate. A Pirate engaged in an act of piracy by stealing product from a Transport vessel no longer on Capsaa; however, Raiders, they were only found on the surface, they may still be Pirates, but on the surface, they raided, which changed their designation. It was just semantics; it did not matter what they were called, they still stole a product that they had not worked hard to collect, and should they use force to do it, then the chances were that someone was going to die.





Big Al – Capsaa Gas Division

2. Formation

This establishment of the CPDF was still some way off, but that fatal event became its catalyst, and sadly, it was not the only event to prompt the development; others only made it inevitable. In these early days, plans were finalised, and the rough edges smoothed to provide a self-made protection force that all now needed.

Those on Capsaa were well aware that no one externally was going to help them in their battle against the Pirates and lone Raiders, because, as a collective, they had looked at sourcing out the contract for this, but it did not go too well. The Imperial Navy had been consulted, reputable security contractors were also contacted, and they had even tried the less savoury mercenary groups that were out there, some no better than Pirates themselves, but ultimately, a disinterest from all these sources told them what they had been trying to avoid. The final decider was the expense of these avenues of defence; the vast number of personnel required made it untenable. This ultimately prompted the PRMH to take responsibility for their self-protection as contracted to do so, something they had always tried to avoid, but now, they were being forced into looking after number one.

Those on Capsaa knew there was a military presence around, the boot print of mankind and its various armed forces were everywhere, sometimes very visible, other times, you might just catch a fleeting glimpse of a huge Slipstream Tunnel the ships made as they passed by, but they rarely stopped at anything other than a war zone, so far, Capsaa was nothing more than a series of minor skirmishes.

The nearest occupied place of any note was Staging Station 193, which was a considerable distance away, and it was the nearest point of any help, medical or military, but any requested military assistance was still going to be a long time coming. There were no military units stationed on SS193 on a permanent basis; it would be luck if a passing patrol ship would be on route or even nearby, so the nearest permanent garrison was on Getone. This planet was further still, although it was also seventy days from SS193; it was more than ninety from Capsaa. That still meant that any military assistance called for was several months away at best, not that the forces there would abandon Getone to deter

some raiding force on a privately-owned and managed planet, so Capsaa would likely still be left to its fate.

That notion further cemented the idea that they had to sort themselves out; it was perhaps obvious, but the PRMH as a collective still bickered over the fundamental basics.

Who was going to run it?

Who was going to fund it?

Who was going to replace lost profits from the use of “their” staff?

It made no sense really, if their plot was raided then they would lose perhaps all their stock of a stored product, maybe suffer structural damage necessitating more expense in repairs, they could even lose staff in some incident and then have to replace them at some additional expense too, and there would be a further loss whilst these new personnel were in transit, so what was a small operating cost on an infrequent basis compared to that potential loss?

The PRMT on the Station could not see what the fuss was about. If they all chipped in, then everyone suffered the same proportional cost, but in the long run, they would all benefit from the protection and significantly reduce the risk of incursion and product theft in the first place. Clearly, they would all profit from that.

Like Capsaa, Getone was another of those planetary oddities. It consisted of five domed cities, yet most of the product of interest was on one of the two moons, and as that product had a military application, that was the reason the Garrison was permanently stationed there, to protect it. As it was, the military was happy to see that some of the product mined on Capsaa was destined for their use anyway. There were several minerals found on the coloured surface that were not found in many other places, and on Capsaa, it seemed there was plenty of it. Perhaps, if the Raiders were to target products the military was short of, then maybe, there would be a change of mind as to whether there would be a decent military presence to protect the shipping and mining operations, to, from, or on Capsaa.

What the PRMC and the PRMH wanted to avoid was a military presence on the ground itself, once they moved in, there was a tendency to take over proceedings, to re-organise things the way they wanted, which stifled business and devalued the plots, they would bring in other things too, other administration and control services, that also meant that many of these companies now on Capsaa would have to pay proper taxes to the powers that be, many preferred to stay well under that radar.

It was still taking too long to get this protection plan done. There needed to be a consensus amongst those on the surface as to how this formation of the

CPDF was to proceed, and with 40,000 plus opinions to gather, it was taking time, which was a luxury they could ill afford.

Other incidents occurred, and it was around the time of the sixth incursion that things gathered pace again. Once more, a larger complex was targeted, and again, there was no resistance from the crew of the facility; they had nothing to offer in the way of any defensive capability. An extreme use of firepower and maximum cargo theft from the Raiders was to be the order of the day; it was not necessary, but it did set things up for future raids. They knew that to reap the benefits later, they could instil the fear now, to bang the drum and rattle the miner's cage today. It meant they would introduce the fear element before they even touched down the next time.

This time, the Raiders came in behind Anitarsius, the fifth of Capsaa's moons, the small ships peeled off and headed for their predetermined target, and although Capsaa Station had picked them up, there was very little they could do. As yet, the warning system was not defined, and no deployment of Defence Force personnel had ever been agreed upon, not that there were any weapons the Defence Force could use; they were still in transit. The Station could do no more than track the incoming ships; they had correctly guessed the target company and had managed to get out a warning shout to clear the compound, but sadly, that message was slow to be acted upon at the target end. The indiscriminate murder of another fourteen of the crew from this plant drove the plans for the CPDF forward at a faster pace than before.

There was a hint that this was perhaps the same group as the earlier fatal incident; there was the same number of ships involved, a similar target company, they stole the same product, and there was a similar outcome, though it had to be said, the connection of the two incidents was never proven. This group were going to keep returning; they knew they had the measure of the local ground crews, and they could take what they wanted when they wanted. The violence just preyed on the fears of all those on the ground. Before long, the Raiders would just be able to swoop in, load up, and almost be welcomed in as long as they kept the guns pointed away and fingers off the trigger, then they could reap the rewards for a minimal effort and take away the maximum profit, that would all be at the expense of some Company who cared little for their staff, profit, it seemed, was everything.

This raiding group were well aware that they could not re-target the same compounds, if they made a big enough dent in operating profits then the affected Company would bring in external security personnel, who were likely to be well-trained and well-armed, that would not be good for the Raiders little

venture, so they picked their targets carefully, there were plenty of them to choose from.

The very next day, the line of communication between the many companies on the surface and Capsaa Station was very busy; discussions for the defence force had already been well underway before, but perhaps it had not been with so much urgency as now. With the latest incursion and the recent death toll, this all had to change very quickly; now, everyone knew they were a potential target. The PRMC and the PRMT were astonished that, despite this now elevated threat to almost all of the Rights Holders, the parent Companies still failed to provide any security for their harvested product. Profits were better than good, and labour to work these places was cheap, it was not as if there was a rebuilding cost involved, a few minor repairs were to be considered acceptable, and the loss of life was regarded as regrettable but inconsequential, it was sad to see that the workforce was considered as the more disposable commodity, in these troubled times, life really was cheap.

The buzz was all about securing a universal communication channel, one that was always manned, always remained active, there needed to be some sort of centralised command centre and it was clear that this had to be Capsaa Station, there was no other logical choice, and each PRMH was reminded that this part of the plan of action had already been agreed upon some time ago, the delays were not due to the PRMC dragging its feet. For its part, the Product Rights Management Company had already conceded that it needed to provide the resources for a defence force to use; it was an obvious choice, it had the space, it had the manpower available, and it already monitored the airspace for the safety of the various Transports that needed landing and take-off clearance. The communication system already existed; it always had, but there was never a shared service, there was no dedicated safety or warning channel. The TRBs already in place were allowed to be used by each company that ran its own communication network, and they used them to communicate with the workforce outside of the compound in their vehicles and safety suits. Before now, the mining companies rarely interacted with others beyond their immediate neighbours, but that now had to change too; all would need to use a dedicated Comms channel for their self-protection and that of the neighbour. The PRMH as a whole already had many discussions on how this defence force was to function, and the biggest issue was the provision of the members of this defence force. There were still too few companies willing to even volunteer to provide people, and the smaller units were still stuck on concerns with profitability and the loss of. The bigger companies were worried that they

would be providing a disproportionate number of members, whilst some provided none, yet still made a profit at the expense of all others.

The talks were still going around in small circles and getting nowhere fast, and eventually, it was Capsaa Station that decided to step in and dictate to all the PRMHs. They felt they had to; if they did not, then the arguments would ensure nothing was finalised, and the Raiders would just take advantage of the indecision on a more frequent basis. Ultimately, it was made clear that they would all lose out. The SAS Capsaa was looking at the bigger picture here; if the incursions continued unchallenged, then there were bound to be more of them. If subsequent raids remained unopposed, then it would be a free-for-all on the ground, incursions and product theft would become commonplace, almost normalised, which threatened everyone's livelihood and plot resale values should some want to leave.

Capsaa Station was perhaps sitting pretty, they had nothing to lose, no product to steal, and the Station was able to defend itself should the need arise, so, they told the PRMH that they all needed to make members available whether they wanted to or not, the SAS Capsaa and its administration was going to dictate how this defence force was going to be formed, after all, they were all in it together. The Station could provide an effective overview of the whole of the planet's surface for incursion risks, and that meant the individual PRMH all had to share in the responsibilities of defending all the planetary installations, even if they were not their own. For the OMBs it was not an ideal situation, as a lone operative there was no alternative but to down tools and pick up a pulse rifle to defend someone else's property, most likely someone they had never met, but, by the same token, should their small operation be targeted, then they should be able to rely on a sizeable external assistance to repel any incursion, the OMB had perhaps the most to gain.

There was a logical pattern of thought going on here. If the bigger compounds become a harder target to raid, then the smaller ones become easier and more desirable. Eventually, the OMBs would become the softer option for the Raiders; they all knew it would happen, it was just a matter of time.

The Station was quick to point out that it was not going to be in charge here; all it was doing was providing the knowledge on any PCD and providing a PSMS reference to that Potential Conflict Destination.

The Planetary Satellite Mapping System was a simple thing; the TRBs were used to provide accurate positioning for any space vehicles, but they could also do the same for ground-based ones. It was not as accurate as the systems on some planets. The Transmission Relay Buoys here were few in number, but they would have to do.

As for involvement in any skirmish, the SAS Capsaa was not equipped to deal with Raiders on the ground; they could only organise the various groups of ground forces to keep them from inadvertently targeting each other. All the PRMT services were there for was to advise, to coordinate, the job of defending the installations had to be organised on site. They needed to make someone, some group, the primary decision-maker; all the Station could do was organise and suggest remotely. The Station could not act unless some raiding vessel came within range of the free-electron laser defence turrets, and any Raider tempting fate with these things was going to get his stupid ass fried, and deservedly so.

There was a need to train the defenders; there was also a need to guarantee that they could be called upon and relied upon to respond. If they did not, then they could not expect their neighbours to reciprocate; if the other facility were the intended target, they had to trust each other, which was always a difficult thing.

Although there was no Planetary Government as such, the SAS Capsaa was in charge of the planet; it owned the rights to manage it, and by that logic, it was the governing body. It was certainly not the same thing as a PG that you would find on any number of colonised planets, and it was true that most mining planets were, in that sense, ungoverned. To an extent, some of these places were lawless, but there was rarely any lawbreaking, perhaps because most PRMHs never met their neighbours, never interacted unless there was some border dispute, and this was usually controlled and resolved by the PRMT that was actively selling the plots. If the Product Rights Management Team had packed up and gone, that meant all available plots were sold; even so, there was usually a resale team to deal with abandoned plots, or with plots re-sold when the miners had finally had enough. There was always some form of Company representative who dealt with Rights disputes and border issues.

The SAS Capsaa had made the decision to dictate to the PRMH, there was no other option, it was the only way this thing was going to move forward with any purpose, and it was decided that they would still have to call for volunteers, and if there were insufficient numbers, then there would be a need to coerce enough people from certain locations to provide adequate cover, and they had a plan for this.

Much of the problem was always going to be the area to be covered; it was vast, transport was limited, and time to get to any given incident would always be an issue, which was a potential source of irritation in itself, a blame game; it could not be allowed to happen.

So far, the information gathered on previous incidents suggested that the Raiders, Pirates, call them what you will, were in and out in a few hours. Although the Raiders needed time to fill the Transport vehicles, they were not too bothered about forcing the site workers to do this for them; having a lascannon or railgun pointed at them generally did the trick. It seemed the violent encounters were very much the exception and appeared to be the work of the same group, and although the type of attack could not be anticipated, it was this particular event that the PRMH needed to discourage. If the planet failed to fight back as an organised defence force, these incidents would only increase in frequency, and sadly, further loss of life was inevitable.

There was, of course, another issue, weaponry; very few people owned a weapon, and to have one was not common. On most planets, there were all sorts of restrictions in place to prevent it, and local law enforcement to oversee it; on Capsaa, there were neither. The general rules still applied, though. There were universal laws that most abided by; there was a sense that, although it was a new planet, it was not lawless, it was just that there was no need for lawmen to enforce rules and regulations that were technically not in place. It came back to the stipulation in the contract that each PRMH was responsible for its security, which meant internal discipline too.

This was a mining colony; there were no policing stations, no entertainment facilities, and no family units. All the structures on its surface were either related to work or were there to provide services like power and food production.

The work sites provided the workforce with accommodation, there would be somewhere to eat and the food and cooking service would be provided, apart from somewhere to work, there was often little else, the bigger places may have some sort of relaxation space, generally, this was just a comfortable meeting area, there may be some sort of visual entertainment, some form of recorded broadcast, but nothing “live,” that was expensive and difficult to find, and alcohol was rarely available, it caused too many problems to be a worthwhile relaxant, and besides, it was dangerous to produce, and exceptionally expensive to buy in.

Females as a source of entertainment and relaxation was non-existent; although not illegal, it would be difficult to manage, and it raised too many moral questions for most companies to allow it.

The various crews never mixed with a crew from another plot; there just was not a need to do so, they were not rivals as such. There was rarely a threat of indiscipline there; they might see each other at times at the borderlines, but they rarely interacted. It was not seen as a negative thing; there may be a

“them” and “us” definition, but it was not an issue, “they” just worked for someone else, and the only reason not to talk was that their EPS comms would be on a different frequency.

Most who worked on the surface were well aware that if you operated in an Environmental Protection Suit, an EPS, you did not want to get tagged or spiked in some sort of dispute with a neighbouring workforce. Getting a puncture in your suit was generally survivable on the surface, but getting yourself punctured was often not.

Quite often, the various workers would be interested to meet others out on the surface; new people to talk to always meant a new line of discussion later on in the working day, which relieved the monotony and added interest to the mundane existence out here; that was a good thing too.

Most large companies would have perhaps three hundred staff; some had more, but these were often spread over more than one facility. The average company would consist of less than thirty staff, and several were less than five members, a few were just one. These loners, the one-man bands, they were the tough nuts, the hard men on the surface, and these were the most likely to have some sort of defensive capability, probably an unlicensed one.

Occasionally, there would be a hard woman, they too were tough, and they needed to be, this life was rough, yet there were women tough enough to live it, they worked as hard, worked as long, and made as much profit as anyone, and they were just as dedicated and equally as knowledgeable as their male counterparts in that respect. They were few and far between, though, and quite often they worked in an all-female group environment, where there was less in the way of temptation and lower personal risk, and quite rightly, most women were very cautious about entering into relationships; it was the smart choice to do without. On Capsaa, there were no general medical facilities to speak of. Yes, there were Medical Stations in the bigger locations, but they were, however, limited to the company staff, not outsiders. No female could afford to get pregnant out here, mainly because there were no facilities for family life, no schools, no doctors, no cohabitable accommodations, and there was no lifestyle here that was suitable for bringing up a sprog. If you were not working, then you were dead weight, no use to anyone; they, more than most, knew the value of the dead weight and were determined to never be it, and they were certain they would never put up with it.

These women working on Capsaa also knew that they were at twice the risk of many of the other Rights Holders on the surface. Of course, there was the same threat of the loss of their harvested product, but there was also the additional personal risk that they themselves could be plundered, which was

perhaps of greater concern for many of them. There was also a risk they could be transported from the planet, sold into slavery, a practice that continued even in this modern era, as unsavoury now as it had always been.

The women of Capsaa would also want not just a voice in the formation of the CPDF, but an equal status; they wanted an active role in the defence force too, and it was not to play nursemaid to those who thought they could not manage the pressure or the responsibilities.

A simple communique was now drawn up, a sensible plan was outlined, and this was sent to all the Product Rights Management Holders currently on the surface; it was to form an amendment to their contract, and they were all required to acknowledge it. There was no opt-out clause; it was all-inclusive, and it was to be incorporated into the contracts of those applying for mining rights not already approved, or those not yet working on the planet, those still in transit.

Advisory Update: Ref CPDF – Automatic Inclusion.

From: SAS Capsaa – PRMT (for and on behalf of the PRMC – SAA-GC)

To: ALL PRMH on the planet Capsaa

TaDRef: 41394:237:16:4

In light of recent events on the surface of Capsaa, where product was plundered, and lives were lost, sadly, it has become necessary to initiate the recent agreement (in principle) between the PRMH and the PRMC, through their representative administrators on the SAS Capsaa, the PRMT. This agreement (in principle) was to create a defence force on the surface made up of staff members of the PRMH Company, namely, the formation of the Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force (CPDF).

The PRMT had asked for volunteers to make up a membership of the CPDF, and the response was poor, so as a direct result of recent tragic events, an Emergency Override of the Rights Holders' contracts has been made. This has been taken with reference to Section 127, Sub-Section 13, Emergency Override clause (EOc) included in all contracts previously issued.

This decision has not been taken lightly and is the direct result of the indecision by many of the PRMH, specifically, in the failure to resolve the issue of self-defence on the surface for the benefit of all of the PRMH.

This EOc amendment to the standard contract, Section 4, sub-section 3.2 (Security) is as follows –

3.2a – ALL Rights Holders will provide staff to fill the membership of the CPDF.

3.2b – The level of membership is related to the number of staff employed, and ALL Rights Holders will provide a proportional representation based on this figure. (see 3.11)

3.2c – No PRMH is permitted to abstain from this amendment; it is inclusive. Any refusal to supply members for the CPDF will result in the PRMH contract being rescinded, and a proportional refund will be made; this will be calculated from the original purchase price.

3.2d – The PRMH will allow the members of the CPDF time for designated training, and the PRMH will provide the member with payment for that training at the standard Company pay rate.

3.2e – No PRMH may prevent a member of the CPDF from attending an incident or a training event when they have been required to do so by the PRMT or the Command and Control Room (CCR).

3.8c – The PRMH will provide an always manned monitoring Comms station, in addition to/ in conjunction with, the existing Emergency Communication System required in Section 3, sub-section 2, 3.0, this is for the purpose of calling to arms the members of the CPDF when required.

3.9 – The PRMH will provide the members of the CPDF with a secure area in which to store the equipment provided for the use of each member of the CPDF. This includes free access to power to recharge equipment.

3.10 – Members of the CPDF are required to defend any installation on the planet's surface. This includes that which belongs to the PRMH, that of any other PRMH outside of the usual plot and Sector boundaries, and installations belonging to and administered by the PRMC.

3.11 – The number of members required for the CPDF is as follows:

1-10 staff = 1 Member required for the CPDF.

Each additional 10 staff employed will provide a further 2 members for the CPDF.

This is a proportional figure; every PRMH contributes a staffing level to the CPDF appropriate to the size of their workforce: 1 staff = 1 CPDF member, 30 staff = 5 Members, 300 staff = 59 members.

New sub-section – Section 4, sub-section 4. (Claims for Damage/Loss - CPDF)

4.0 – No PRMH can claim compensation from the PRMC or its representatives in the PRMT, for loss of earnings whilst any member of the CPDF is on active duty, or whilst training.

4.1 – No PRMH can claim compensation for damage or loss from the PRMC or its representatives in the PRMT, nor from any other PRMH, should the CPDF not be able to halt any theft of property or product, nor for any damage caused in the execution of an incident.

4.2 – No PRMH can claim compensation for damage or loss from the PRMC or its representatives in the PRMT, nor from any other PRMH, should the CPDF be unable to attend an incident at the location of any PRMH plot.

The CPDF will be formed from ordinary members of the PRMH crew/workforce, the PRMH should ask for volunteers, and, if insufficient numbers volunteer, then it is suggested a lottery be drawn and the members made up by this method.

You have five days in which to get the names of the required workers for inclusion in the CPDF.

Should you wish to, you may exceed the required number of members for the CPDF, but you must meet the required minimum. Members of the CPDF should all be on the same shift where appropriate (1-5 members) or alternate shift patterns depending on the total membership available. This should reduce any disruption to your (PRMH) working cycles when the membership is required to attend any training event. It will also allow members to be available at all hours of the day, whilst on a work cycle or rest cycle.

There are several things to note that do not need to be added to a contract or should not need to be added to a contract. The PRMC has generously provided staff and equipment in order to monitor and coordinate events, this is given free of any costs to the PRMH, this is in exchange for the CPDF being able to defend (if required) the installations of the PRMC, in the form of the power, water, air and food installations, any manufacturing and fabrication facilities, and the Star Ports, all of which the PRMH will rely on to some extent, so the defence of these is also in the interest of the PRMH. It should be noted that any of the PRMH installations will be the primary defensive objective, unless, of course, the only threat is to one of the above PRMC facilities.

The PRMT has created a dedicated Command and Control Room (CCR) for the detection of threats and the coordination of the CPDF response to those threats. This is provided at no cost to the PRMH.

The CCR is in control of the response to any incident, but can only rely on reports from the CPDF on the ground. Should a secondary threat be made

unseen by CPDF members on the ground, then a PRMH may request CPDF assistance, and, if available, a CPDF response will be sent.

It is expected that all PRMHs will provide transport facilities to allow the CPDF to operate. Any response to a threat has to be rapid; remember, it may be your facility under threat, and you would want another PRMH to allow their CPDF members to defend your facility as quickly as possible.

The CPDF is not there to protect your installation from a perceived threat, they are there to respond to an actual attack in your general Sector area, if you delay their response time to ensure your facility is safe, then expect another PRMH to do the same when your Plot is under physical attack, this has to work for everyone, and it requires that everyone works together at all times.

It is expected that everyone will play fair; it is in everyone's best interest. If it should be proved that there was an unnecessary delay in dispatching a CPDF unit in response to an incident, then there will have to be consequences, there will need to be further discussion on this should the situation arise, it is hoped that it will not be necessary, but it will have to remain an option, and hopefully, it will not be necessary to include any sanction as another amendment to the contract, this point is entirely in your hands.

The watchwords must be resources, regulations, and responsibilities. You will have the resources available, the regulations determine the actions required, and we all share the responsibilities to act in the interests of everyone.

The PRMC has obtained military-grade weapons for use by the CPDF, and spare parts, essential components, and the like, for use by the members of the CPDF. The PRMC will pay for these at cost price (it is not to be charged to the individual CPDF member under any circumstances); uniform equipment is provided by the PRMC at no cost. The PRMC has also conceded to supplying training for the CPDF members, which includes tuition on the weapons, basic tactics and safety protocols.

It goes without saying that it is hoped that the members of the CPDF will not be required to defend any facility on the surface of Capsaa, but, recent events suggest that the frequency of attacks on installations is increasing, and a response must be made or all those on the surface will be a viable target, this cannot be allowed to happen, every facility is at risk.

Included/attached to this communication is the updated contract with the additional amendments added. Each PRMH is required to sign it and return it; you have 5 days to provide the names for inclusion in the CPDF. There is no need for excuses, all heads of the PRMH on the surface have the authorisation to sign amended contracts, particularly under the terms of an EOC, delays for

Head Office approval will not be accepted, it has got to the point where all are under threat from external forces intent on stealing product, and unfortunately, I will have to be blunt, sign, or prepare to leave Capsaa, licences will be rescinded.

Jules Malcolm

Head of the Product Rights Management Team, SAS Capsaa.

For and on behalf of SAA-GC, the Product Rights Management Company.

The PRMC had now forced the issue; they had decided to dictate how each PRMH was going to provide members for inclusion in the CPDF, because it was obvious that they were incapable of doing this for themselves. There was to be no get-out clause for joining, the PRMC was going to make the rules that everyone had to abide by, the PRMH could not refuse, it was now to be added to their contracts, and if they chose to reject the instruction to join the CPDF, then their licence to mine would be withdrawn, the situation now warranted such firm action.

All the Rights Holders had security concerns, it did not matter if they had one hundred staff or they were the only ones, all on the surface were equally under threat, every plot was a potential target, and if they did not have each other's backs now, then they were not going to be able to reduce the threat of incursion later, more compounds would lose product, more compounds would be picking up their dead and counting the cost.

The calculation was simple, for every unit of 10 staff members or less, they needed to supply a minimum of one member for the CPDF, those with more staff would provide an additional two staff in every ten, so if you had twenty staff you provided a minimum of three, for thirty it would be five, and so on, it was not rocket science to work out. The PRMT had accurate numbers of every PRMH staffing level, every Transport in and out had a verifiable headcount, and the paperwork required to get to Capsaa, or to leave it, was incredible; nothing got in or out without the relevant authorities knowing about it. Thankfully, no one refused to sign, and amazingly, the documents were returned within two days of being issued, just under forty-five thousand of them, which kept the Station admin guys very busy.

The CPDF was now official; it was fully defined, perhaps not active yet, but technically, it did now exist. Its formation was almost a disappointment, there should have been some sort of celebration to go with it, for it was a momentous event in the greater scheme of things, but instead, there was a degree of inevitability about its creation, a realisation that it was not what the

PRMH nor the PRMT had wanted, both forced into it by piracy, it was not a free choice for any of them.

Without the abbreviations, the name was a bit long-winded, the Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force, the words a bit too clever for some, maybe a touch posh for most of those that earned a living here, yet many liked that notion, the feeling of belonging to something better bred.

The name Proletariat could be interpreted several ways, in its simplest form it meant the working-class people collectively, the workers, and the name was perhaps appropriate, this defence force was a collective, a collection of small numbers of those working on the surface of Capsaa, and they would be a force created to defend the installations and lives of those within all of them.

Now the tough part came, organising the vast number of PRMHs into providing names to populate the ranks, there were going to be no uniforms, you did not want people wasting time in getting changed, but there were caps and armbands to be made available when these items reached Capsaa in the next shipment scheduled for arrival on the surface, that was not for another thirty-seven days, the PRMC had foreseen the issues and dispatched this equipment weeks ago.

Any weaponry would need to be paid for, it would be stored and maintained by the PRMH, and they could be acquired through SAA-GC, the PRMC, at highly discounted rates, these were also on route, anything not required on the surface yet was to be stored on the SAS Capsaa, this could be issued as required when other Rights Holders set up on the planet.

Internal Memorandum

From: Office of Jules Malcolm, Head of the Product Rights
Management Team

To: All PRMT Divisional Leads - SAS Capsaa

Subject: CPDF Formation - Implementation and Compliance Schedule TaDRef:
41394:237:16:10

Classification: Internal Use Only

Following the recent activation of the Emergency Override Clause (EOc 127-13) under Section 4 Sub-section 3.2 (Security), all PRMH entities are now contractually obligated to provide proportional staff representation to the newly formed Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force (CPDF).

Initial compliance reporting indicates that most Rights Holders have acknowledged the amendment; however, several entities have yet to provide finalised rosters. Divisional Leads are to ensure full submission of assigned company personnel lists no later than six (6) local days from the issue of this memorandum.

Coordination with the Training and Deployment Office (TDO) must be prioritised to ensure readiness for first-wave drills. Liaise with Logistics Control to confirm supply allocations for the CPDF standard kit and atmospheric equipment.

All inquiries are to be directed to the PRMT Operations Liaison Desk, Ref:
41394:237:16:14.

Jules Malcolm

Head of PRMT - SAS Capsaa

For and on behalf of SAA-GC, Product Rights Management Company

3. Early Days

Things moved on quickly now that the PRMH was forced into action. They agreed that once a month, the staffers would be required to meet, train, practice, and take part in mock defence scenarios in preparation for an actual event. So that the employee did not miss out, the PRMH was required to make a standard wage payment at normal contracted rates, this was perhaps tough on the one man bands as they lost out on a day's production, but it had to be done, it had become a necessary evil, they needed to fight the Raiders fire with return fire from the CPDF, if they did not, then they all could burn in the long run and that could not allowed.

The PRMT had still not decided how this was going to play out, the theory had yet to be put to the test, but they knew it should work; the basic principle was sound. Now, it was the practice that needed to prove the theory.

The PRMH now had three standard days remaining to provide the members for the CPDF. Next, there would be a series of obligatory orientation exercises; unfortunately, the clothing and weaponry were still en route, so they would not be available.

There was bound to be an issue with shift timings, which was another wrinkle that needed to be ironed out, but they would get around it; they had to, and it was an already considered problem that had a solution prepared, all it required was accurate information that could be updated in real-time to a central register, and the concern could be negated.

At least this coming exercise should prove that the concept of the CPDF would be able to function in the real world, not just on paper, though time would tell how effective it would be; many would rather not put it to the test at all.

From the Space Administration Station side of things, it was simple; their job was to advise on the detection of an incident, inform the nearest members of the CPDF, and then leave them to do the dirty business.

There were still things to be worked out; it was not going to be easy to set this thing up, there would be teething problems, and no doubt there would be issues and objections that would need to be resolved as they arose. They would

work it out; they now knew they had to, if they did not, then the PRMH could all suffer the consequences of product loss and possible staff fatalities. Potentially, there could be damage to the facility, which meant days of lost production, additional rebuilding costs, and lower yearly profits, and that was always a good incentive to get things done.

Something that had already been seen was the reluctance of some Transport companies to travel to Capsaa, several of the PRMH had already needed to make alternative arrangements for their processed product to be collected, which meant more product stored on the surface, a bigger target for the Raiders, there was a degree of paranoia going on, both on the planet and off it. If these raids increased in frequency, then several more of the independent carriers would pull out. The cost of a failed contract was nothing compared to the potential loss of a cargo ship, and that cost was considerable.

Currently, the risks were steadily climbing.

That pulled collection contract would leave many on the ground with full storage units and nowhere to offload it, that meant that the mining staff would have to cease work, and as they were under contract, then they still needed to be paid, and if the storage points were already full, then there was no space to put any new product anyway, that was more profit lost.

Everything revolved around Coin, the failure to make any, or at least the delay in making more, and the loss of it through theft, adding on the time it took to replace “lost” staff, and the cost of no production; it was this collection of potential circumstances that had driven the initial CPDF concept forward. Of course, it should not have been necessary; they should have done this on their own many months ago, possibly years ago, and if they had, forty-odd lives could have been saved already.

The comms side of things had already been discussed and resolved. Capsaa was essentially flat, so basic radio communication was a simple series of signals relayed and boosted from building to building, plot to plot. A limited network already existed with the Transmission Relay Buoys, so they did not need an additional network of expensive satellites. It was perhaps the only part of the defence system that had already been tested. Several messages had been relayed from the opposite side of Capsaa to the Station, specifically to test the relay capabilities and to see if there was any significant delay or lag. It passed with flying colours, as expected; there were no issues. When other company sites were on the dark side of Capsaa as it rotated, they too were evaluated. It appeared that there were no dark spots; the comm’s system was now a proven concept and should offer the early warning notification that they were all after.

The only unknown was what happened when the various moons passed close enough to the surface to disturb transmission, though perhaps any sensible Raider would avoid these times, too. The weather in these events made flying extremely difficult, and if you could not stand up in the severe storm events, then how were you to load any stolen product?

All they needed now were the personnel and the transport to a PCD sorting, and of course, the weapons training, then they should be able to offer some resistance to any Raider. The logic was sound; they had to provide an armed response to an armed incursion, to send a strong message, namely, that the storage facilities are no longer a soft target, now the surface compounds have their own sting in the tail, and they will no longer offer just a waved white flag. Now, if a Raider wants a free ride on someone else's labours, then there will be a higher price to be paid.

This, of course, relied on an armed response being dispatched in a timely fashion and the CPDF being willing to meet fire with fire; both of these notions were as yet untested theories.

The network of satellites, the TRBs, was a leftover from the very early beginnings of the planet Capsaa. This small network of Transmission Relay Buoys had been set up for the detection of raiding forces, in particular, Freeloaders. The TRB network was put in place by the APVs that the SAA-GC had sent in to protect the Station from further damage, and to protect the repair teams and their Transports when the planet had been initially discovered. The relay links functioned well, and they had been added to when the number of users became busier with the influx of thousands of PRMH now using it, and there was excellent transmission coverage over the entire globe. As there were very few blind spots in the vacuum of space that surrounded the planet, it worked well for the shipping too, but there were still some holes where the detection systems did not overlap.

In the early days of Capsaa, the APVs had detected many Raiders and chancers wanting to get a slice of the mining action, and all failed to reach the surface except as scrap metal. The Armoured Protection Vessels were ruthless and highly efficient, and like now, a message needed to be sent.

Right back at the beginning of this amazing planet, there were those who would try to land on the surface and dig out some small treasure for themselves, hopefully, sneaking out undetected to sell their illegally obtained cargo later. The PRMC did not want a free-for-all. The Armoured Protection Vessels that were dispatched at that time were there to protect not just the DERV Capsaa and the myriads of repair ships required to restore it, but also the Company's investment in the planet and its resources. These APVs

patrolled the area successfully for quite some time, you did not argue with them and come away unscathed, they were tough little ships and were aptly named, heavily armoured, beautifully designed, and more often than not, expertly crewed, and the protection part was also not to be underestimated, small they may be, but they packed a big wallop as several chancers had already found out to their detriment.

Before that time, the planet of PC17827761 had seen little in the way of any scheduled shipping passing close by, certainly, none destined for its surface, and although someone had named the moons found in orbit around this striped planet, they had skipped on checking out the planet itself, never named it, and subsequently, they missed out on a huge fortune.

The area around the planet might have been used to Raider incursions; it was likely that those Raiders were out here long before the unfortunate incident with the DERV Capsaa. It was likely that they would just pick off the odd cargo Transport in some Hyper Jump Slipstream Tunnel if they could, making a meagre living from the few ships that passed by, though they probably just came to the area to hide from whatever military intervention they may have disturbed in shipping lanes elsewhere. These Pirates had missed out on a huge payday, too; had they bothered to land on the surface of the planet before it had been officially registered by the Capsaa crew, they could have had the discovery bonus and the option to retire from their hazardous occupation. The PRMC had shelled out a discovery bonus of over forty billion credits to the DERV Capsaa crew. That size of payment was unheard of, but it just went to show why the planet was now subject to these incursions; there was an absolute fortune just sitting there waiting to be collected. It was always going to be the case that some people wanted something for nothing, sadly, it was typical of human nature, though some of these Raiders could be described as far from human, humanoid they may be, but any humanity had long been stripped away many years ago, that is what you get when you stare into the Darkness in the Deep too often.

History would show that the ship Capsaa was eventually repaired, its use modified from a Deep Exploration and Research Vessel to a Space Administration Station, and the planet Capsaa was also carefully prepared; its use was about to change just a few years from discovery.

Once it had been agreed on how they were going to portion it up, most of the mining rights would be sold off within a few months of being offered, and although there were still around fifteen thousand plots unworked at the moment, there were fewer than a thousand unsold; these were mainly the medium-sized plots.

It took a while between buying a plot and getting here; it was a considerable journey, and you needed the basic infrastructure built before you arrived, then you unpacked, set up your own particular mining operation, before eventually getting down to business. It could take at least a year just to arrange for the manufacture of the equipment you needed, and the delivery would require extra time on top of that. The journey here from the nearest Staging Station, the previously mentioned seventy days, was bad enough, but they came from many more light-years distant to work this place; even fifteen years after seeing the first plot occupied, there would still be several companies that were yet to make landfall, their journey was going to be that long.

In the beginning, at the genesis of Capsaa, once the newly repaired Station was up and running, the base makers moved in. They built platforms for buildings, which then housed huge iron foundries; they made the steel for the building frames. From that, they constructed the Crete plants; these things churned out tons of papcrete to make the infrastructure walls, and they made construction blocks and built compounds. They built smelting plants, which manufactured the finer equipment necessary in the preparation of the surface, and there was even less reliance on materials coming from SS193.

The first proper facility opened was the Space Port, which was logical; you needed somewhere to offload the equipment and materials. They then built the first of many power generation plants and did away with the reliance on mobile generators, then it was water filtration equipment and food production facilities. Now the workforce sent here did not need to rely on supply ships; they grew their food, filtered their water, and things kicked off at a far greater pace. The workforce increased again as more power generation plants, water treatment facilities, and food production domes became available, then they powered the customer plots, connected the water supplies, built the all-important air tanks and waste disposal systems, and several years on from the discovery of the planet, finally, the place was ready for its first inhabitants.

By this time, the shipping loads inbound had already decreased as more reliance on home-produced materials was utilised, but still, more Space Ports and Cargo facilities were built, allowing for a higher volume of traffic, which would be needed to ship the product out when the mining began at pace. For a while, the APVs stayed. There was still the odd incursion by some chancer looking to make some quick Coin. These were not Pirates, they were Freeloaders looking to scoop up some easy product and scoot off, no harm to anyone, or so they thought. The PRMC took a seriously dim view of any freeloading, and the APVs were the long arm of this Galactic Conglomerate's fist, and they punched hard. The sensible amongst those trying their luck did as

requested when they were challenged, and they were always challenged first, fired upon only if they did not comply. The ones with any common sense backed off; they were escorted away, given the chance to survive this experience, but not all had such good judgment.

Once the plots started to fill, and the Freeloaders could still not sneak in unnoticed, the rate of incursions dropped off to almost zero, and the place was becoming too busy to slip in unnoticed and remain unchallenged.

It took a while before the construction work ceased and the APVs were withdrawn, then the planet was on its own, at least until another APV arrived as an escort for some Cargo delivery, these eventually diminishing too.

The SAS Capsaa had its own very good defensive capabilities; a series of deck-mounted laser cannons would see it remain unmolested, but it was useless against any surface Raiders. They did not need to provide this service; the PRMH was to resolve its own security problems, as they were frequently told, it was part of the contract they had entered into.

The APVs had done a good job of keeping the undesirables off the surface then, but now, those less scrupulous operators had worked out that there was no external protection most of the time, and anything on the surface was likely to be no match for the hardened lunatics that made up most Pirate groups. The attacks that had started recently would only increase as time passed, if they did not make a stand now, they, the Rights Holders, those that paid to dig out the profits the planet had to offer, would have no idea what the future would hold, but they all knew for sure that it was not going to be any sort of future they would welcome.

Five days passed, and there were only sixty sites that failed to provide a list of people that could be called upon, which, out of a total of nearly forty-five thousand, was not a bad failure rate. With a bit of prodding over the next few days, all eventually complied, and the list of the members of the CPDF was finally completed.

It did make impressive reading. The newly formed Proletariat Defence Force was a rag-tag collection of just under seventy thousand, but the numbers were deceptive; the largest group on a single shift was just thirty-six, and most were threes and fours. Getting these people organised was going to be awkward, to say the least, particularly as there was no fixed shift pattern on Capsaa; different Companies worked to differing time patterns from others, so there were going to be times when members were going to be on shift, off shift, or resting, asleep.

The logistics of organisation were vast, a simple database of names and plot locations was not going to be sufficient, they needed to have a live active list,

an accurate list of who was available at any particular time, and where they were on the planet surface, but they had already anticipated this and this active list was populated with the names and shift patterns, now they needed to get it up and running.

The planet was already divided up into Sectors, each Sector contained a varying amount of plots, and this determined the number of members available, this was further quantified by who was working, who was off shift, not working, and who was resting, asleep, effectively unavailable at short notice, it seemed a difficult organisational task, but they were making it work.

On day eight they had completed the database updates, and on day nine came the acid test of an exercise, many thought this was pointless, the weapons were not on the planet, and the identifying clothing items were not here either, but as it was pointed out, they were not going to shoot at anything, what they needed to do was work out if enough members could be called upon to react to a test incident, they needed to see what sort of response times could be expected.

This was going to be a test for the benefit of every PRMH; if it did not work out, then the organisational efforts of the PRMT were going to be in vain. At the end of the day, the PRMC had already been paid; contractually, they did not need to do any of this additional work. They could leave the PRMH to sort out their own mess, yet the PRMC felt they had a duty to perform, and now, the members of the CPDF had a service to execute for the benefit of all on the planet; they had to make this work.

Jules Malcolm had coined a phrase for the promotional posters to encourage voluntary sign-up,

CAPSAA PROLETARIAT DEFENCE FORCE
YOUR WORK, YOUR WORLD, YOUR DUTY.

Someone else had come up with,

DEFEND YOUR COMPOUND.
DEFEND YOUR COMPANY.
DEFEND CAPSAA.

The slogans obviously worked; they had the membership required.

There were sixteen exercises called at the same time, all in different Sectors, all with different-sized groups, and all aimed at responding to the most likely target within their Sector. The shout went out that there was a (fictitious) attack about to take place, and using some previous data to simulate how long it would take a Raider to penetrate the atmosphere and land at a potential target site, this fabricated threat was then tracked, an approximated PCD was given,

and member groups in those locales were mobilised, that part worked well enough, but there were issues.

The database was accurate, and those called upon were those not on a sleep cycle, so that basic idea also worked as expected. Working radio frequencies were assigned, and the various groups were dispatched to the incident location, which had now been confirmed as the potential conflict destination. The multiple groups did get there, but with wildly varying time scales, one three-man team arriving a full hour after the first members at the PCD.

That was not going to work.

Some units were far better organised than others, all had some form of transport available, most had some sort of crew vehicle, and a few had what was referred to as a Cutie, QTs, more properly called a Quick Transport Vehicle. Typically, these things were for a maximum of eight crew; they were faster than the Crew Bus, the Cee-Bees, mainly because the Cee-Bees were bigger and heavier, and seated sixty. They needed to get these Cee-Bees to pick up some of the smaller teams on the way to any PCD, and this was another logistical problem. If the target was in the opposite direction from the site of the Crew Bus, then it would be driving away from the PCD, not toward it; that was time wasted.

The SAS Capsaa needed to add another variable to the database, who was going to pick up who, and how. Still, it was not all bad, at each location there was a group of the CPDF members who had made it on time, or at least, at around the same time, and their numbers suggested that they should be able to put up a decent arc of fire to hopefully scare off any potential attacker, and that was all they needed to do, scare them off, they did not need to engage with them in hand to hand combat.

Of course, until an attacker turned up, they would not know how effective this potential deterrent was, perhaps the biggest worry was that there were very few that had ever fired a pulse rifle before, and if you missed your target with one of these things, there was the potential to do some serious damage to anything you did manage to hit that was not the intended target.

The next day they did it again in another sixteen Sectors, and the following day, and the day after that, and the next, and they continued for twenty days in all, three hundred and twenty Sectors, and at some PCDs, the best available response was perhaps twenty of the CPDF, at others, they could call upon sixty or so, the average was thirty-five. Trying to get these people to arrive at a similar time, from opposite directions, not get caught in a potential crossfire, and put up a united front was proving to be difficult, perhaps that was an understatement, but at least the basic principle worked.

It was decided that they would do this again in one month, at different times, call upon different member groups, and choose different PCDs. What they hoped was that there would not be a need to deploy before the weapons arrived; the ETA for that was now updated to nineteen days.

On arrival, there were a whole different series of events planned, with the weapons came one hundred instructors, which was a gift from the PRMC, SAA-GC, they knew that they had to invest something in the defence of the planet, any infrastructure that did not belong to a PRMH belonged to them, and as a collection of buildings, they were the biggest owners on the surface. These one hundred instructors were there for seven days only, just one-tenth of the time it took to get there. In that time, they had to teach nearly seventy thousand how to shoot straight, and perhaps as important, how to look after the weapons.

An LPR, a Laser Pulse Rifle, was a precision instrument; you needed to look after it. If you did not, then it could not look after you or your property. All PRs relied on an electrically generated laser pulse, which meant clean pulse generators, clean target scopes, fully charged battery packs, and several charged spares. The weapons needed to be placed in secure storage, the packs needed to be in the same place and always on charge, that much the instructors could teach but not control, they were going into the field to show how these things worked, they were not going to Company Compounds to check on storage and charge facilities, there was not enough time.

Those on Capsaa were perhaps lucky, the nineteen days passed without incident and the Cargo's turned up half a day early, and with an APV in tow, which promptly scooted off looking for trouble to solve, there was not much point in having a fast attack ship if all you had to do was babysit some big fat slug of a Cargo ship, the crew wanted action.

The areas for use by the instructors were set up according to a specific set of instructions; each location needed to be identical, each had to have areas in which things could be displayed and easily seen, and a sound and video broadcast system was installed so that everyone got a good view of what was going on via the huge screens. These screens were borrowed from wherever they could find them; several came from the SAS Capsaa, and a few others were borrowed from the supply stores of the bigger industrial complexes on the surface. The installers and those setting up were mainly from the teams usually responsible for growing the foodstuffs on the planet, and those who would normally set up and service the planet's power and water supply chain. It was a welcome break from the norm, and several of them were used to the

LPR; they would be part of the internal defence squads on the Station itself, though they were not expected to defend anything on the surface. The instructors were dropped off at the SAS Capsaa; there was nowhere on the surface for them to stay, but their time here was already mapped out to the finest of details, and the seven days on the planet started tomorrow. At first light, what little of it there was, saw three crew hoppers heading for the surface, this would be the first of several trips for the pilots today, they dropped off groups of ten instructors in the areas set up for their displays, tomorrow would all be different locations but the same scenario, and then the next day was the same, just a different shift timetable. The CPDF were mobilised in certain areas for their training and then directed to locations that were already set up and ready. They used several of the unoccupied plots for the training and target practice; this bit, at least, was going to be easy. Every member was to be issued with a nice new combat standard LPR, four battery packs, a webbing sling with pouches for the spare packs and other things, and a combat BFM. They would each get an identifying dark blue armband and a grey combat cap, both with the newly designed CPDF logo on them; this was as uniform as it got. Other than that, the individual members were to provide their own protective clothing, an EPS was perhaps too bulky and awkward, but as a lightweight combat suit was not generally available, most used what was known as a Reckers, a recreational suit, these were lightweight, strong, flexible suits that could be worn as an alternative, many would use them for exercise outside of the buildings and inside the compounds where there was less risk of a puncture, but the downside for many was the colour, most were very bright. The distribution of the kit took the best part of half a day; there were forms to be signed, serial numbers to be taken, member IDs to be verified and logged, and ID cards to be issued, all before they could get anywhere close to learning about what these weapons were capable of. The next half of the day was a talk and demonstration on how to care for all they were given, how to clean them, how to keep the pulse generators clean without getting slammed against the wall by a residual static discharge, and the warning that any RSD was not a pleasant thing to experience. They were all shown how to charge the battery packs and given advice on where to store them, and there was a very important lesson on how to change them in a combat situation, which could save their life, and the all-important instruction to not throw the pack away; it may be discharged, but it was not useless.

Next was a lesson on how to use the comms equipment, the combat hat had a built-in mono-speaker and a boom microphone, a simple dial device re-tuned the frequency, and there was a small flip-down HUD connected to the sun visor with a digital display that could show map details, or a readout of the digital frequency logged into.

Many of those who regularly worked outside of a compound were used to a Heads Up Display; it was a useful device that kept you within your plot boundary or advised you that you were in someone else's. Some had never used one, and a few had never been beyond their compound walls.

There was a real sense of professionalism starting to emerge. The worry was always that this rag-tag group of miners were not going to take this CPDF thing seriously; it would become perhaps something of a joke. Most were aware of what the alternative was, and living like frightened sheep every time a spacecraft flew over the compound was not what they wanted.

It was only in the last hour of the shift rotation that the new members of the CPDF got to fire one of the LPRs, and it was, for many, the realisation that they may actually have to take a life or risk losing their own, that was perhaps something of a reality check for most of the newly badged troops of this fledgeling defence force.

It went well, though.

All were shown the best way to use one of these things, at what range they were most effective, and at what sort of target, preferably, a soft one.

Initially, they were taught how to tackle an airborne threat. What you wanted to do was put the Raider off landing his forces on the ground. The logic was sound. What would you rather deal with, one ship or the thirty men it carried?

Individually, they had no hope of much more than flaking a chunk of paint off even the smallest of craft, but if they concentrated their firepower, then they could do some proper damage, perhaps not just drive the vessel off, but actually bring it down, anything, or anyone that escapes, well, they can come back to shoot at you again.

That was about all there was time for, they had a whole shift of training on how to become an effective force by looking after the equipment they were given, and some instruction on how to use it wisely, tomorrow was fine-tuning and more practice, now they were to take the weapons, charge all the batteries, and turn up "in uniform" at the designated location in the early shift tomorrow.

At the specified time, a group of oddly coloured troops had turned up, the only thing "common" amongst them was the combat hats and armbands, and all were wearing their lightweight combat Breather Filter Mask. It was a good

start. This day was to be dedicated to tuition on tactics, how to deal with your enemy most effectively and be able to survive the experience, and more training on how to fire the weapon as an individual trooper, and later, as a group picking on a bigger vehicular target.

Basically, the best advice was to cover your teammate's backside, and they will cover yours. If you all look out for each other, then you have a greater view of the threat before you, which also gives the group a better chance of defeating the opponent and surviving the encounter.

They were taught to watch out for the crossfire; the emphasis was on trying to keep their team and those of the CPDF all to one side of the enemy. If you end up in opposite positions, then you risk shooting your own, which is never a good thing.

There were other basic tactics, stay together, concentrated fire was more effective, do not stand there blatting away at your target, do it prone and from a covered position, that way you present less surface area for your opponent to aim at, listen for the commands given, move as a team, attack as a team, if necessary, defend as a team, it is no good if everyone looks after number one, again, it comes down to concentrated fire is more effective than a single pulse round. It was the most basic of basic training. These were now raw recruits; very few had ever fired any sort of weapon, and most of them had never even seen one for real. The demonstration of the damage these things did to a soft target brought home how vulnerable each team member was.

The assembled groups were shown again how the weapon operates, its safe use, the changing of the batteries, the importance of not chucking away the discharged ones, and where to place the various pieces of kit on your webbing belt where they were most useful to you. Most of it was common sense, you had the good batteries in a side pouch, the duds were at the back, torches were either on the left or the right, it depended on which hand you were going to use, most people held the pulse rifle in their right, that was the trigger hand, so the torch needed to be on the left, same with the first aid kit and LiSP pack, most knew how to use one of those.

The spare batteries would usually be on the left side; this was simply because it was the hand you were most dexterous with, which made it easier to change the battery pack. This was simplicity itself, you removed the new battery from the pouch left-handed, in the right hand you held the weapon, with the button on the right side of the LPR you ejected the used pack onto the ground in front of you, then inserted the good unit, fired if you needed to, and picked up the old discharged battery pack and placed it in the rear pouch, it took around six or seven seconds if you practised it, if you took much longer you were a

stationary target waiting to get perforated, that was to be avoided whenever possible.

There were targeting tips too, if you aim to injure rather than to kill, you have a much bigger target area to aim at, but, the downside is that your enemy may still be able to fire his weapon, injured is not necessarily disabled, and an injured man needs to be finished off, if you do not, he may shoot you in the ass as you run past him.

There was a word of warning: do not treat the enemy with any compassion. He may be moaning and groaning as you approach, but you have to remember that these are Pirates who live for the fight, they will use deception, they give no quarter and expect no mercy, for them, it is kill or be killed. The CPDF members needed to match them in this respect; they had to kill or be killed, and it was made clear that there was no halfway in this. This was do or die; you had to pull the trigger because if you did not, then your opponent would. The injured Pirate would not hesitate; they had done it before and will do it again. If it is not you in their sights this time, then it will be your teammate, but you have to remember just one thing: you may still be next.

It was a sobering thought, many expected this CPDF lark to be something of a game, big boys playing with real guns, but shooting at static targets, it was dawning on many that this was serious. There was no element of fun in this, and if they could not act responsibly, then they were likely to die. Like they were told, if it is not you in the enemy gunsights this time, then it is sure to be one of your teammates, and should they go down, you may still be next in the line of fire.

The CPDF members were left in no doubt that this was no joke; there was no role-playing here, but they did have a role to play, and if they chose to play at it, then they were likely to die; that was definitely no joke.

The week passed quickly, and the instructors did their best over the three-shift periods; all those designated as members of the CPDF received training and instruction, and hopefully, it would stand them in good stead come the day when their compound was the PCD.

The instructors could clearly see that some of these people were never going to make it past the first incursion event. Others were far too gung-ho in their attitude, treating the CPDF like it was some schoolyard game of guardsmen, and they were probably a greater danger to their teammates than an enemy force. Unfortunately, there was little more the instructors could do; they had done what was asked of them. These miners were all volunteers; most did not really want to join an armed response unit and put themselves in the line of

fire, but most had been cajoled into it by circumstance. Now, they had been trained as best they could in the limited time available.

Hopefully, it would be enough; it would have to be.

The supplied weapons were to be stored by the companies that were to provide the personnel necessary to make up the CPDF. The storage area needed to be inside a building, not in the compound where they may be blocked by materials, or worse, in an area cut off by the invading enemy force, and most companies already had it worked out. There was a compromise between safety, security, and convenience.

Still, the training schedules for further exercises had not been fully agreed upon. A week on from the training, it seemed that although the larger companies allowed their staff to train and practice, it was for the defence of their installations, it was not for the benefit of all. That, perhaps, was all well and good if they were inside their own compound and that is where the threat was, but it did not prepare them to defend a rival mining company's location. It was put upon the many company management teams to change their mindset; if they were not prepared to let the CPDF members assist at other locations, how were they to expect others to come to their aid if they were the intended target? Eventually, they could see the sense in all of it; this was not just about defending their own, this was about attacking a Raider. If they could put them off returning to the surface for good, then this amounted to the same thing; they were still defending their own. There would be no damage or disruption caused, no product stolen, no staff lost, for all the companies on the ground; it had to be a win-win situation.

As the various recruitment posters mentioned, defend your Compound, defend your Company, defend Capsaa.

For the members of the CPDF, it made perfect sense; scaring the bad guys away was the smarter move. If they could turn up, fire at some spacecraft and drive it away without the CPDF being fired upon, then that was a win-win for them too. If the word finally got out that Capsaa was no longer such a pushover, they can all rest that little bit easier. But it was early days. The resolve of the individual members had yet to be tested, and that is where it all hinged. If they simply turned and ran, then the CPDF, as a fighting unit, stood for nothing; it would fail, and the raids would continue.

They could not let that happen.



OK, that is your 3-chapter preview (44 story pages of 244) plus some additional images that are only found in this preview version.

Depending on the version, the Kindle edition is around 420 pages, the printed version (6x9”) is around 244 pages; in either case, all the full editions are nearly 113,000 words.

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The Genesis of the CPDF was released in May 2026.

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4. First Blood
5. Round Two
6. Quiet Before the Storm
7. A Silence Shattered
8. What Next?
9. Storm Warning
10. Storm Force
11. Relentless
12. Relief

OFFICIAL RECRUITMENT NOTICE.

DEFEND YOUR COMPOUND.

DEFEND YOUR COMPANY.

DEFEND CAPSAA.



Official Recruitment Notice
TaDRef: 41394:237:16:10

In light of recent events on the surface of Capsaa, where product was plundered and lives were lost, it has become necessary to initiate the recent agreement between the PRMH and the PRMC through their representatives aboard the SAS Capsaa, the PRMT. This agreement mandates the creation of a defence force made up of staff members of the PRMH Companies – the formation of the Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force (CPDF).

Companies are reminded that cooperation ensures not only their continued success but also the safety of all on Capsaa. Appointed company liaisons are expected to ensure rapid compliance and efficient reporting of designated CPDF members.

CAPSAA PROLETARIAT DEFENCE FORCE — YOUR WORK, YOUR WORLD, YOUR DUTY.



Jules Malcolm
Jules Malcolm

Head of the Product Rights Management Team, SAS Capsaa
For and on behalf of SAA-GC, the Product Rights Management Company.



Image Reference: CPDF-VIS-41394-237-16-04-A Render Authority: PRMT Visual Division
Issued by: Jules Malcolm (Head, PRMT) Software Pipeline: PRMT Render Suite v.12.4 / SAA-Verified Engine

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GLOSSARY – The CPDF

(Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force)

APV – **A**rmoured **P**rotection **V**essel

AsTrID - **A**stral **T**ransport **I**nvigation **D**ivision

AAT – (missile) **A**utonomous **A**ctive **T**racking

BFM – **B**reather **F**ilter **M**ask, a basic mask to adjust the balance of air content breathed in

CC – **C**argo **C**arrier, a vessel's designation to denote its function

CCR – **C**ommand and **C**ontrol **R**oom, like on the SAS Capsaa

Cee-Bees – a squawk term, a nickname, for a Crew Bus, typically seats 60 passengers

Cheap Speak – a dumbing down of technical jargon into something most people can understand

Clicks – squawk for kilometres

CMO – **C**hief **M**edical **O**fficer, in squawk (see below) Seemo

CPDF - the **C**apsaa **P**roletariat **D**efence **F**orce, the CPDF

Cuties – a squawk term, a nickname for a QT, or Quick Transport, an 8-seater surface buggy

DCT – **D**amage **C**ontrol **T**eam

DERV – **D**eep **E**xploration **R**esearch **V**essel

DPRS – **D**eep **P**enetration **R**esonance **S**can, a type of scan like ground penetrating radar

EDS – **E**mergency **D**istress **B**eacon

EJM – **E**mergency **J**ump **M**ode

EOc – **E**mergency **O**verride **c**lause, an option to add extra clauses to a PRMH contract

EPS – **E**nvironmental **P**rotection **S**uit, a basic space suit, suitable for other environments too

ERT – **E**mergency **R**epair **T**eams

ESD – **E**lectro-**S**tatic **D**ischarge, a shock delivered from a static voltage

ETA – **E**stimated **T**ime of **A**rrival.

FEL – **F**ree **E**lectron **L**aser (gun) turrets, usually deck-mounted on a ship's hull

HQ – **HeadQuarters**.

IC – **Incident Controller**, usually at a compound under Raider attack

IMCU – **InterModal Container Unit**, a shipping container

InfoPath – The rumour mill, gossip

Kph – **Kilometres per hour**

Kps – **Kilometres per second**

LiSP – **Life Saving Pack**, basic puncture repair kit for your EPS, patches, glue and inert powder

LPR – **Laser Pulse Rifle**, a standard soldier's weapon

Merc – squawk for a Mercenary, a private armed contractor

MPD – **Missing Presumed Dead**

NoFAR - a report, **No Further Action Required**

Papcrete – A specific mix of materials to form a radiation-resistant concrete.

PCD - a **Potential Conflict Destination** (the estimated point at which any Raiders land)

PFDS – **Personal Funding Depository Service** – basically, a banking account

PG – **Planetary Government**. The local governing body of a planet or small star system

Pokehole – Jail, lock-up, prison

PRMC – **Product Rights Management Company**, the owners of the Planet or Moon

PRMH – **Product Rights Management Holder**, the purchaser of a Plot or Sector

PRMT – **Product Rights Management Team**, representatives of the PRMC, looking after the planetary infrastructure, they also buy back and sell the plots

PSMS - The **Planetary Satellite Mapping System**, able to give a precise map-referenced location

Pulse Cannon – Ship-mounted defence cannons using pulse-generated laser projectiles.

QR Code –**Quantitative Reference code**

QT – the squawk term is Cuties, properly known as a **Quick Transport**, an 8-seater surface buggy

Reckers – a squawk term, Rec Suits, Recreational suits, lightweight sports-derived space suit

RHJD – **Rapid Hyper Jump Deceleration**, basically the rapid slowing when exiting HyperJump

RSD – **Residual Static Discharge**, typically, the release of a build-up in static electricity from a battery, usually this was unplanned and painful

SAS (Capsaa) – the **S**pace **A**dministration **S**tation

Scripts – A prescription for medication

SecCom - Secure Communications, a direct point-to-point link of communication

SPE – **S**olar **P**article **E**vent

Spiked – A suit puncture, usually by something natural and sharp, often accidental, unlike tagged

Sproggs – a common term for Children

Squawk – A form of speech, short-squawk, usually derived from an acronym turned into a word, sass from S.A.S. or Cuties from QT

SR-TRB – **S**hort **R**ange **T**ransmission **R**elay **B**uoy

SS – **S**taging **S**tation, basically a Space Station, usually a resting point to refuel or a sales point for product

TaDRef – **T**ime and **D**ate **R**eference

Tagged – a space suit puncture, often not a natural occurrence, often stabbed by someone else

TRB – **T**ransmission **R**elay **B**uoy

TS – **T**erran **S**tandard (Time), in some places an STU (Standard Terran Unit)

Utility Belt – a belt outside your spacesuit (EPS) for holding various small tools like brushes, torches etc.



About the Author –

Born in 1961 in London, England, he moved near Bristol in the summer of '69 and vividly recalls seeing the grainy black and white images of the first moon landing as it happened. It was an exciting time of discovery.

Cliff was already an avid reader of science fiction by then and grew up watching the excellent BBC TV series Doctor Who. He remembers watching it in black and white in the mid-'60s, hiding from the Cybermen behind the sofa! This was complemented by other sci-fi series throughout the '70s and '80s, such as Blakes Seven, Quatermass, Day of the Triffids, and more. He left school to attend college, studied catering, became a chef, and worked briefly for the MoD, which is when he started writing for fun — mainly scribbles in a notebook (the paper kind), none of which have survived.

He married Caroline, and they had two boys; the books took a backseat while family life and other commitments became the priority. As the children grew up and left home, the parents moved on too.

Caroline and Cliff relocated to the Costa del Sol and have remained there ever since. They moved a few times, but the better weather suited Caroline's health. In 2005, the original typed notes for his early book were rediscovered; that book, "Orbiter One," reignited his creative spark. The book was finally finished in 2012, though it wasn't published until 2020.

Over time, he compiled more storylines for the Orbiter One series along with other stories, including this one. Several more are planned, and some are waiting to be finished. It seems there aren't enough hours in the day, but he manages to work on more stories in his spare moments.

He still benefits from his understanding wife's patience, enjoys more green tea, and spends many enjoyable hours contemplating while listening to Pink Floyd, David Bowie, and Be Bop Deluxe. When that fails, he often takes a ride on his motorcycle.

Now, at over 60 years of age, he has a bit more time available, though, as he notes, not quite as much as when he first started writing. Nevertheless, he hopes to complete a whole series of follow-up stories to some of his earlier books.

They are both still on the Costa del Sol, enjoying the Spanish weather at the Finca (their fifth house move), with freshly picked and squeezed orange juice for breakfast, straight from the orchard, and fresh lemonade in the afternoons.

At the time of writing this, several other stories are also complete, but this is the 7th book to be released, and the second in the Capsaa series.

Other new stories are already well mapped out and ready to be put to digital ink when Cliff can find the time.

Anyway, enough of this waffle, Cliff hopes you enjoyed the book, and perhaps you will come across others previously published in due course.

(February 2025)



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