

A (BRIEF) STORY OF CAPSAA

The (brief) story of Capsaa

by Cliff Dale

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This short story contains “spoilers” for other stories that are not free to view.

So, if you want to read about -

The Genesis of Capsaa,

or find out more about the

CPDF, the Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force,

then I would suggest you don't read this story until. much later!

 **Cliff Dale**

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Deep in the constellation of Apparatus Sculptoris, you will find the planet Capsaa, pronounced cap-sah. It is just off the cosmic equatorial plane at Right Ascension: 00h 47m 33s, and at a Declination of $-25^{\circ} 17m 18.0s$.

The planet Capsaa was discovered in the early 40th Century, quite by accident as it happened, and it became one of those seemingly insignificant places that turned out to be quite important in the greater scheme of things, not that its discoverers knew that at the time, nor did they care; they were busy just trying to survive.

A Deep Exploration Research Vessel happened upon the planet by misfortune. They couldn't help it; they were without engines and had very limited steering at the time. The vessel had just been mugged by a forty-strong horde of Pirates intent on stealing a cargo they just didn't have, and they battered the vessel until it broke. The DERV did manage to escape the clutches of the Pirates, and took out a fair few of them too, but it cost the lives of one-third of their own crew. These poor unfortunates are now permanently resting on the moon of Hazelium, itself permanently fixed to the southern pole of Capsaa.

The crew of the DERV fixed the broken vessel as best they could, it wasn't a pretty fix, but at least the ship wasn't quite going to fall apart around them, but they were stuck there, the DERV was going nowhere, its exploration days were over, to repair it to a state where it could once again travel within the Warp tunnels was a cost too much for the company that owned it. By chance, whilst waiting for the repair crews to arrive, they decided to fix the scanning array and test it out on the planet they were now hiding behind. What they found was amazing; it is what they had been searching for over the past nineteen years. It was sad to note that despite their best efforts and best planning, it took an accidental journey, and the lives of one hundred and fourteen crew, to find what they had been looking for, a proper discovery bonus.

Still, they got paid well for the find; the total was seriously impressive. All DERV crews were looking for planets with resources. If those resources had value, then it was assessed, and the crew were paid a discovery bonus.

This crew got paid the highest bonus ever recorded.

It wasn't that big a planet, perhaps two-thirds the size of the Terran homeworld, and by comparison, it was a harsher place. There was sunlight, and although its Sol was weak, it provided enough warmth in most places to keep it from freezing solid, though both polar regions were very cold indeed. At both poles, a warm day was measured in the minus fifty degrees Celsius range, and around the gas

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pools, it was a rather bone-chilling, lung-freezing, minus one hundred and fifty or colder. The average daylight temperature for much of the surface was perhaps more pleasant by comparison, around plus nine degrees, and it was constant throughout the solar year; the only real variations came at the poles and the equator. At night, the temperature slowly leached from surface materials, and by the time the daylight arrived again, it was down to a solitary one or two degrees Celsius.

The place was quite flat, no mountains and very little in the way of hills. There was a rocky granite ring, but these were dotted with stone monoliths pointing skyward rather than hills. It did have volcanic regions that bubbled away with the odd lava pool and sulphur pit, though these hardly raised anything higher than a small cone-like protrusion that often fell over time. It was the sandy region of the equator that appeared as a raised, yellowed ring around the centre of the globe, but despite this minor elevation, it was still flat, and this region, in particular, was very dry.

For Man, the air was breathable, just, it had all the right elements, but it was not in quite the right proportions. If you ventured outside without the breathing filter masks, you could survive for perhaps an hour or two, but rarely longer. For many of the invading species that were not born of Mankind, this atmosphere was sometimes perfect, for others it was toxic, but they were not there to bask in the sun or take in the sights, but to strip the planet of its resources for their own gain, much like Man was doing in the first place.

As for radiation, there was the usual cosmic background radiation, and there was some generated by the natural geology of the planet's minerals, and on much of the surface, you didn't need an Environmental Protection Suit (EPS); all you required was warm clothing. The local Sol didn't seem to produce particle events; it was perhaps too distant, and it was true that it was a very different makeup from the Sol that provided warmth and light to the Terran homeworld.

The atmospheric pressure was similar to the Terran standard, which was most helpful, and it made a pleasant change from many other planets that Mankind colonised throughout the vast cosmos. On Capsaa, it was only slightly lower at 0.9ATM compared to the Terran standard 1ATM. Some still used 760 Torr; rarely in these modern times was it referred to as the old standard of 14.7 pounds per square inch. The bonus was that it was not necessary to have complicated machinery, storage facilities were lighter, cheaper to build, and construction for buildings needed no special considerations, they were simple, and they were quick to erect and dismantle when you needed to move on to the next processing location, or, to abandon after some invasion attempt, and, even to repopulate in the aftermath of conflict.

One thing that was good was water, it wasn't drinkable without filtration, but it was good old H₂O, plain and simple water, there wasn't much of it on the surface, but it ran deep underground and was more than sufficient for the life

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forms that inhabited the surface, there were a few small puddles of the stuff, the odd river where there was a gentle slope, and plenty of little pool spots and rivulets that eventually drained into just the one sea, albeit a large one. The weather was an odd thing; the planet did have clouds, it had some truly spectacular electrical storms, and it also suffered from some ferocious winds at times, but it rarely rained.

It was designated as a ringed planet, each ring being of a different geology that gave a particular colour. The best scientific guess was that the centrifugal forces in action as the planet formed had separated the various elements into the layers as it cooled, which divided the ores and minerals into coloured bands. As you approached the planet on your final landing vector, after coming out of hyperdrive, you clearly saw this effect from some way off. It looked inviting, it looked genteel, sadly, this was an illusion; it was a tough place to live, not dangerous, at least not in the most part, but it wasn't as welcoming as the colourful rings implied.

The rings consisted of the off-white polar ice caps, they were in part frozen water, but mainly consisted of small frozen lakes of hydrogen, nitrogen and oxygen, and more importantly, larger lakes of frozen argon, the most commonly used fuel for Ion drive propulsion engines in many a spacecraft, this was perhaps what many were chasing when considering waging war to wrestle control of this abundant resource. Beyond the ice fields were the light brown tundra rings, light soil and pale tundra grasses. Not much commercial product was found here, but it was a good place to set up the infrastructure to process and store the frozen gases and the processed ores and minerals. What followed was a purple-hued ring of an abundant crystallised gemstone; it was tough and pretty, had some commercial value and was easily mined, graded and stored. It was also a surface that was ideal for heavier industry and storage. Next, you had the blue ring, the colour ranged from the glorious deep cobalt blue to pale sky blues mixed with the base granite rock, it was rich in ores and minerals that were used throughout the galaxy, and as such, it was an easy money spinner for commercial ventures. This led into the best ring for the indigenous plants, it was this ring that produced a mainly green circle around the planet, much of which was a simple form of algae or lichen, this was the area with perhaps the greater proportion of surface water pools and small water rivulets that drained into the one vast sea on the planet, this sea literally went from top to bottom of the planet and was the only break visible in the rings. The next ring was a grey granite one, which signified a temperature change, and meant the next ring was a barren and dark brown baked soil; it was harsh and rocky with very little plant life. The volcanic pre-equatorial ring that followed was often a fiery red, dotted with yellow sulphur cones and hot to the touch rocks, small lava cones and bubbling lava pools, and here and there, were flammable liquid gas pools that danced with a purple and turquoise flame flickering upon their surface. The wide belt that was the centre

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of the planet's ringed system was a hot and sandy place, dusty and very dry. The equatorial belt had no surface water, and even the tough grasses struggled to survive here. The yellow ring consisted mainly of sandy soils, with yellowed sulphuric hard rocks and long dead sulphur cones that dotted the region, a leftover from the volcanic red ring that surrounded it on both sides. It was a foreboding place, unpleasant smells, pockets of noxious gases that scorched unprotected lungs and peeled layers off unprotected skin, and the dryness was relentless but bearable. It did have its good sides; here and there were many of the gemstones the planet had to offer, the hard-compressed carbon-based type used in commercial production cutting tools, and brightly coloured gemstones still used in the finer jewellery, sought after by those who appreciated it and could afford it. The precious gems were often handpicked from the surface, the commercial stuff was just below it, but much had to be done by hand, the surface was soft and shifting, you could not land a conventional craft on the sand because it offered no solid surface, but you could drop in cargo containers and crew pods, and hover ships could simply pick them up again with the all-important cargo. Here, the work was tough, it was hot, it could be dangerous, and an EPS was an advisable precaution, but the value of the product combined with the ease with which it could be collected, tempted many into a small but profitable venture on this distant outpost.

In the Southern region from the central belt the ring pattern repeated in reverse toward the southern pole, there were a discernible seventeen rings to the surface, in a very clearly defined nine colours, it really was a pretty sight, particularly if you happened to fly across where the vast Capsaa sea was visible, the vista delivered a shimmering surface punctuated by the numerous coloured rings, and at night, there was an eerie luminescence to many of the rings.

The orbit around its sun was long by Terran standard time, just under four years, but it was stable, seasons were not present, and organic plant life on the surface was limited because of this. The Capsaa flora consisted of just basic grasses and little else other than fern-like plants; there were no trees, though there were coloured flowers, some of which had huge leaf-like structures, but they were not the same thing. Indigenous animals or population were not found; there were no insects, no reptiles, hardly anything lived here except for some naturally occurring bacteria, and here and there, basic algae and lichen-type growths were found on the rocks and at the water's edge, though not in any great abundance. A solar day was ninety-two hours standard time, and any Terran-based food crops that were planted, struggled, and had to be grown in covered hydroponic ponds as they would not survive outdoors for long, and where they were planted in experimental trials, they never reseeded on their own. All the natural flora was inedible; it was tough and fibrous, but then, there was nothing on the surface to eat it. All it had to contend with was a weak sun and the occasional strong storm; the plant life never evolved much, it didn't need to.

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Capsaa had its own satellites too, there were five of them that were in orbit around it, there were the aging moons of Hazelium, and Paulinius, the largest of the five moons, a force to be reckoned with on the surface of the seas, occasionally ruffling the waters and influencing the weather at times, creating storms that come and go just as quickly, to be forgotten until the next time they appear. Then you had the busy satellite that was Carolinicus, it always seemed to be dashing around the night sky, and sometimes, it was visible in the daytime skies too, it created many a wave and a storm when it appeared in close proximity to the other moons, occasionally affecting the orbit of all the others, sometimes in a good way, sometimes not, often though, it went on its merry way doing not much at all, just being there, visible, but dormant. The last two were the newer moons, offshoots of the others perhaps, there was the erratic orbit of Daleium, which in turn had two smaller orbiting satellites of its own, Ryanoris and Scotti, and the other was the tempestuous moon that was Anitarsius, this intersected often with Daleium, threatening collision but always seeming to avoid it in the end, with the two smaller orbiting satellites pulled and pushed between the two when their paths crossed. All in all, these satellites coexisted happily in the greater scheme of things, tolerating each other's orbits in the main, and only occasionally blowing up into something more volatile, only to return to calm as their orbital paths diverged once again.

Most of what Capsaa had to offer the DERV crew would never know, the company that owned the DERV had already paid the crew off, shipped them out, and set about parcelling up the planet to sell off as mining plots, it was a diamond of a discovery, even the poorest sites were exceptionally rich in resources, this place was a goldmine, and yes, both diamonds and gold could be found on the surface. The highest value resource, though, was a gas, liquid Argon, which powered most of the universe's Ion drive engines; everyone wanted a piece. They sold off the plots, the miners moved in, the company made bucket loads of money selling off the plots, and even had a residual income in supplying power, air, water and food, all produced on the surface, and they made a killing.

The riches available didn't go unnoticed by those who didn't want to buy a slice of the action; they decided it was more profitable to steal it. Initially, it was the shipping lanes that were targeted; anything leaving fully laden was a target worth taking on. Not all the cargo ships made it back to the staging station 193; several of the pirates didn't either, as not all the ships were unprotected. Eventually, the Pirates realised that the real easy pickings were the unprotected storage facilities on the planet surface, and so the raids began.

The rich ores, gases, and minerals that were mined were useful, they were valuable, and some were essential, especially as a fuel source for interstellar travel, which made the planet worth fighting for and worth defending. Despite all these conflicts, there was little in the way of a defence force, nor in defences

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themselves, those that wanted the commercial rights to mining didn't seem to see the security of their investment as a worthwhile expense, and as was perhaps the way of the modern world in these dark times, the population were considered as expendable too, war was also seen as inevitable, and any drawn-out conflict slowed production and ate into profit margins.

The raids grew in frequency and in ferocity, miners died, and still there was no defence against them. Each of the mining companies was responsible for its own facilities protection, but they didn't want to pay someone to defend them; some more were targeted, more miners died, and still the companies did nothing to protect their workforce. The people on the ground gave up waiting and decided that they needed to look after number one, the self. The CPDF was eventually formed by the miners themselves, and all of this came about with a bit of help from the Global Conglomerate that owned the planet. The Capsaa Proletariat Defence Force was never a professional unit, but despite that, the inhabitants of Capsaa never surrendered when their backs were against the wall, abandoned by their employers they would stand up and fight them all, sadly, all too often, this was in vain, and the population, small as it was, were often removed with extreme prejudice by some invading force, or enslaved by the same until the next group arrived, often, only to be enslaved again until the good guys eventually showed up and released them.

That was the problem, the good guys were good, but they were distant, light years away, and the planet was essentially privately managed, they didn't have to care, not until the invading forces were some species intent on setting up a staging post nearer to the Terran homeworld, that would not be tolerated, then the response was swift, or at least as swift as travel in the Warp tunnels would allow, and it was brutal. Then those forces would stay a short while, repair their own equipment and lick their own wounds, and then they left, leaving the planet on its own again, until the next lot showed up to stick their blood-encrusted boot on Capsaa soil.

Capsaa was an odd little planet, really, but it had its uses, and over time it had been colonised to be mined for its ore, minerals and gas. As a result, it had often become war-torn and subsequently abandoned, only to be reoccupied later and plundered for its resources once more. It would inevitably suffer more conflict as a result of its continued commercial success, and so, this process of occupation, war, and abandonment was a repeating cycle.

In many respects, Capsaa was a plain planet, ecologically sound, it was modest but tough, reliable and resilient, colourful but simple, and if you treated it well, then it would look after you, treat it with disdain and it could burn you, but that was rare. There was a dark side, but those events were few and far between; they had the ability to change the whole scene and tone of the place. It was an experience many would like to avoid, but were destined to play out. It was, on the whole, a nice place to be, a steady and considerate place, constantly evolving,

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allowing expansion, promoting innovation and pushing the boundaries, allowing things to go that extra bit further just because it could. There was also a sense you could rely on Capsaa to do the right thing by you, there was no reason to, you had most likely only just arrived, but it appeared to offer something, invite you toward greater things, it seemed an immersive experience awaited, more rewards, a better future, you saw the basics, then realised the potential, and eventually, you grasped at the notions of what was perhaps to come in the future, would it be so?

Only time would tell.

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