

Spheres of Hammarskjöld

by

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Her name was Hammarskjöld, and she was the most ambitious of all man's creations. A thousand feet from tip to stern, three hundred feet from top to bottom, capable of comfortably fitting ten thousand souls, with a maximum capacity of just over fifteen thousand. She was a barge, drifting almost aimlessly through space, escaping a dying world.

Hammerskjöld was a collaborative project produced by the greatest thinkers and engineers of the developed world. It was costly, often cited as scandalously so, yet ambitious. Built in orbit, and designed as a self-sufficient deep space colony, it was supposed to be the first of many destined to drift the solar system. Unfortunately, while on the way to the Mars Colony during its maiden voyage, Earth fell into a world war, in which the surface of the planet was turned to dust.

The citizens of the Mars Colony begged and pleaded for the Hammarskjöld to pick them up on the way by. There were just twenty thousand of them, to Hammarskjöld's five thousand. Surely, they could make it fit! But the captain at the time knew that they could not. He gunned the ignition, coasting the ship off into the distance.

For two centuries they soared, activating a short burst of thrust every ten years or so. The people all fulfilled their roles on the task until the end of their lives. Food was grown in the large biodome. Trash was remade into new materials. Resources were shared equally. The Hammarskjöld, for some time, was exactly how the United Nations had planned it to be: a utopia among the stars.

Over time, however, the balance of society began to break down. Although professions were chosen based on merit and aptitude, the role of Captain was always given to the previous Captain's favourite relative. Although the crew had been promised equality of gender and race, the women were still treated with bias, and the number of visible minorities were low, allowing them to be easily subjugated. The proportion of security officers rose, and they became the most valued class of individuals after the Administration Crew itself.

After two centuries, the population had risen to over twenty thousand, stretching resources well beyond their limits. Many people were without luxury, starving, sleeping at their jobs. There was some speculation that diverting Hammarskjöld's course just a few degrees could bring them into a solar system within the next decade, where they could, perhaps, begin to form colonies, maybe even creating a sustainable facility within twenty five years, thus ending the overcrowding and the starvation. The Administration

Crew rejected this notion on the grounds that it would be too risky and require too many resources. Many believed that it was simply because the Captain did not want to give up any of his own luxuries to serve the children and grandchildren of his subjects.

The Administration Crew rejected this notion. During the reign of Captain Stefan Harbello, in the two hundred and seventeenth year, the disenfranchised, the dissatisfied, and the empathetic exercised their right, according to Hammar skjöld's charter, to protest his decision not to divert course. They gathered in the Community Square. They were nearly two thousand voices, all asking for change, asking for a reason why.

Bubbles floated through the air and up to the arched ceiling, propelled by the breath of thousands, their insides filled with blue and white confetti. They were a representation of the lifestyle they had all grown up with and known their entire lives; boxed up in a bubble of their own, threatening to burst at any moment if not treated with care, its contents spilling out wherever they so happened to be. Bruce could read lips. He could see Captain Harbello through his binoculars, sitting in his chair, on his balcony, overlooking Community Square, which was packed full of protestors. The Captain was complaining that even when the protestors left, they would continue to be an eyesore, leaving their confetti all over the floor. He promised his right hand man that if a single bubble popped over his balcony, he would put a stop to them immediately. His man merely nodded his head. No bubble was going to make the two hundred foot journey up here.

The feeling of the crowd was that of warm celebration. A tenth of the ship's population was here. Change was on the road ahead. Signs waved above their heads, bearing slogans such as "BRING US PLANETSIDE" and "STOP THE CORRUPTION" in bright red letters. He could hear chanting all around him. As one, they yelled "TURN US AROUND!" again and again.

The fringes all around the crowd were flanked by Security. Almost the entire squadron was here, plexiglass shields in one hand, beam rifles in the other, their faces masked by their red bandanas and their dark helmets. Like water pouring from a tap, several of them burst out from their line, grabbed a man that Bruce could see near the edge, and pulled him back to arrest him. Bruce had been observing the man for some time because of his interesting hat, likely an antique, but had not noticed what he had done wrong.

The first wave of bubbles popped, pouring their contents over the protestors' heads. Below their feet, the massive United Nation symbol sprawled across the floor, depicting an Earth which had not existed in two hundred and seventeen years. They were taught that life on Earth had been hard. People with disabilities were often forced to live out their lives, and people killed over religion and race. They had social problems, horrifying ones, and not a glimmer of hope for anybody. Bruce knew that much of this was true. He was a teacher. One of the things he taught was history, and he had read many of the archives. Much had been lost with Earth, but there was enough to know that the

planet had once been consumed by its biodome, and that it was human beings who cut it down and turned it into a construct and eventually blew it up. But they had also made great works of art, and they had borne many great achievements.

He was at this protest for his son. Six years old, living in the same ninety-six square foot suite as his mother and father. The best that boy could strive for was to become a member of the Security team. Nobody ever made it to the Administration Crew unless their parents were there first, no matter how hard they worked. Although Hammarskjöld was a meritocratic society, the Administration Crew as a collection of about three hundred men, all related, all with the same coloured hair, and coloured eyes, and white skin. They took any luxury they wished, any woman they desired, and made the decisions as they saw fit. Despite this, there was a democratically elected council, chosen from among them. Bruce knew that some of them valued the interests of the people.

Harbello was visibly perturbed as they began to sing. They were singing the Hymn of United Nations, the anthem aboard Hammarskjöld. Some people had brought instruments with them, and a chorus of violins, clarinets, flutes, trumpets, even tambourines filled the confetti-strewn air.

*Fill the skies with peaceful stars,
Let us extend our hopes to Mars,
Grow side by side,*

It was a majestic song, of joy, and hope, and compassion. Two thousand voices strong echoed through the halls of Hammarskjöld. The radio system had picked it up, and their voices and their instruments rang through the wires and into the workplace of all twenty thousand seven hundred and eighty six citizens. The birds of the biodome fluttered around the artificial sky as the caretaker raised the volume on his player for all to hear.

*Through love and compromise,
We build our paradise,
One Nation to parry lies,
Grow side by side,*

In every tiny cubicle, in every workshop, in every distribution centre, the sound of the people warmed the hearts of all. They stopped what they were doing to join in. Unanimous longing pulled at the very fabric of Hammarskjöld's delicate society. The protest was working. They were letting their leader know that they were unhappy with his decision. No man could do anything else but make the right choice. A third wave of bubbles followed the second's explosion during a momentary pause in the lyrics.

*We will not fight the wars,
We will not break what's ours,
We will not lose our hearts,*

Grow side by side,

A rogue bubble made its way past its fellows as they popped. It was big, bigger than any bubble Bruce had seen before, the blue and white confetti inside a perfect image of the United Nations symbol. The globe floated up and up, over Captain Harbello's head as he followed it with his eyes. It hovered above him for just a moment before popping, showering his face with confetti which poured down like spoiled milk. He rose to his feet.

"ENOUGH!" he roared. His voice was magnified by the microphone hidden in his collar. The entire ship went silent, staring up at him as he leaned forward on the balcony's railing.

"You think this ship is a democracy?" he said, scanning the audience. His right hand man stepped behind the velvet curtain at his back. "You think you've gained freedom and happiness and prosperity? You think you've escaped the monarchy that was Earth?"

"Well you haven't!" Harbello spread his arms wide. "All this that you see before you belongs to me, and my children, and their children after them. You think you get to speak up for rights and freedom simply because you elect members of my family, people who all have the same goals? You think any of us care what happens to the Blacks, or the Asians, or the Women, or the Gays? The winners of the elections are meaningless. This ship will continue to fly in the same direction it has always flown in, even if it means driving us into the sun.

"You are all pathetic. Every one of you, singing the national anthem. Do you even have any capacity of the irony? The United Nations did not even have an anthem when we left! My ancestors sprinkled some sappy lyrics into an old British anthem celebrating their *Queen*. Their *Monarch*. And every day, you all stand and cheer and hum this song, thinking that somehow you can sway us into giving all this power up.

"Well we won't," Harbello made a motion with his hand. "You do not get to argue against the Captain of a vessel. You should all know better than to question him. Than to disrespect him in such a way."

As one, the Security team moved in, their shields ahead of them. Canisters of yellow gas fell upon the protestors' heads, the contents choking them and burning their eyes. Bruce managed to get low, his handkerchief over his face, so that he would not breathe any of it in. The crowd crushed into him like a wave. All he could hear was screaming, and all he could smell was sweat and gas, and all he could feel was the crush of a thousand bodies pushing into him one way, and a thousand more pushing him the other. Somebody yelled out "This is a peaceful protest, we have a right to be here!", and that is when the shooting started. Beams fired from the rifles at the Security officers' hips, tearing people apart. A man fell on Bruce's left, a women on his right. He ran toward what he thought was one of the exits.

He was met by a wall of plastic, pushing him back into the crowd. He fell onto his back, and boots stomped on his body and his arms. The Security team rolled over him, trampling him, leaving him bloody and raw. He rolled onto his front, watching as the Security team formed an ever tighter circle around the ever-thinning crowd. Dead bodies covered the ground around him. Beneath him, a violin had splintered under his weight, never again to perform another note. Above him, Harbello smiled.

Those who were not killed were thrown to the floor and forcibly handcuffed, Bruce included. They dragged them down into the deeper sections of the Hammarskjöld, where the prison was kept. There were not more than a hundred or two hundred of them left, but the prison was not meant to hold this many. They were crammed in, some of them released from their handcuffs, some not. Bruce was crushed under the weight of his comrades. They were left there for days, maybe weeks. Bruce could not tell. All he could see was the wall and the people piled on top of him. They were not given food. They were not given more than a pitcher of water between all of them. He was confident that one of the people leaning up against him had died.

Eventually, they were released, smelling of urine and fear and death. Bruce stumbled home to his family, and when they asked him where he had been, if he was okay, if he had been caught in the terrible riots, he told them that he had simply been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. He did not want Security to think that he had ever been a part of the riot.

Years later, after the bodies had been jettisoned into space and the short-lived rebellion quickly crushed, while his son blew bubbles outside in the hall, even Bruce would say that the actions of the Administration were understandable, given the stress the protestors had put them through.