

Futures

In response to your request for a modification to the atmosphere of break bulk cargo hold 17

A breath of fresh air. By Sylvia Spruck Wrigley

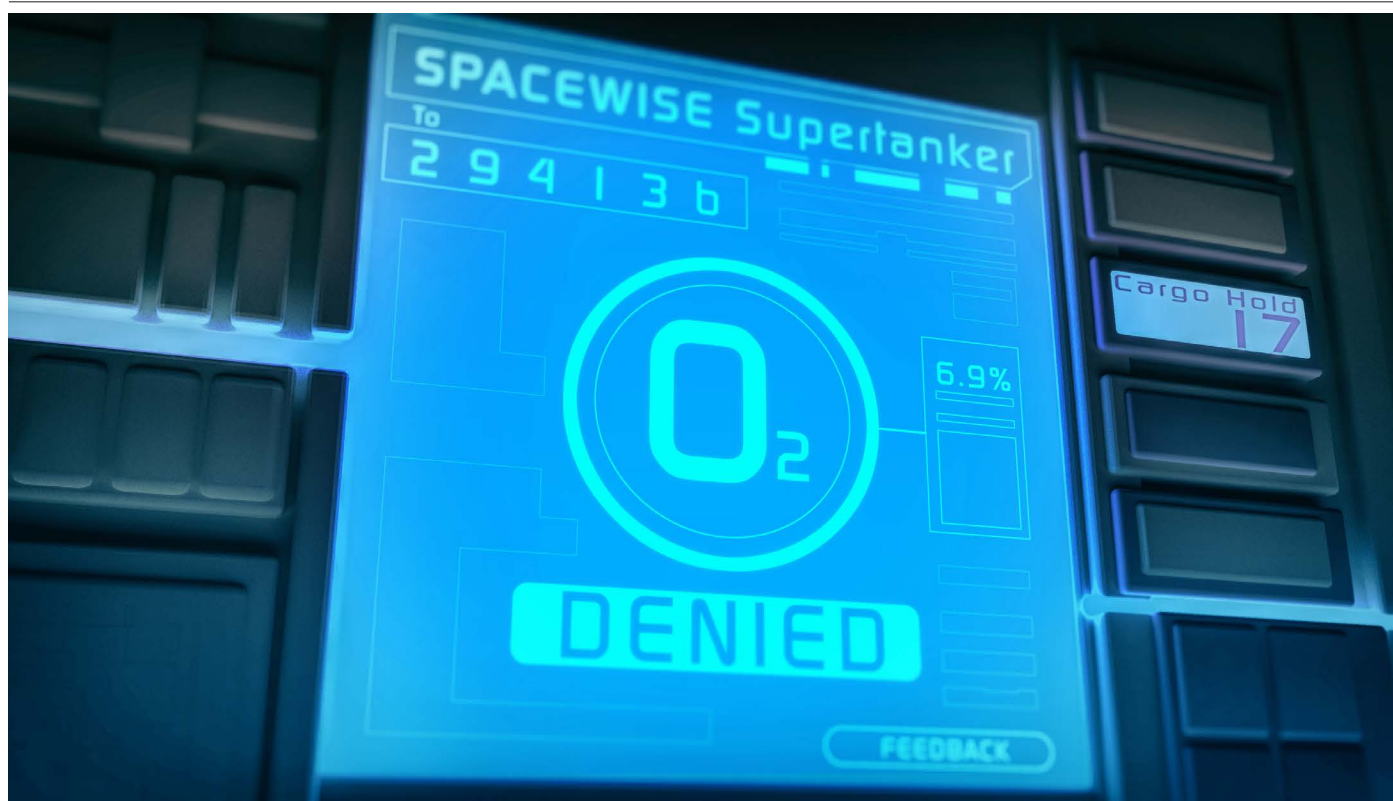


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Dear inhabitant 29413b, We appreciate your letter and especially the fact that you took the time to write to us about your feelings of anxiety regarding your surroundings. We are 100% committed to maintaining an environment in which everyone, including our more diverse members, is comfortable reaching out to share their experiences and perspectives in order to encourage an ongoing dialogue. We take seriously our pledge to build trust, encourage compassion and reinforce open-mindedness.

We would like to reassure you that the atmosphere has been carefully developed to accommodate as many species as possible. As such, we have to ask everyone to accept that

there is a period of adjustment. Only through patience and compromise can we cultivate a diverse and inclusive environment for the good of all the inhabitants.

Our commitment to the peaceful coexistence within the community is unwavering. The cornerstone of our holistic approach is to address honestly and head-on the needs of all of our inhabitants. We must all work together towards bringing our best to fruition. As such, we are asking you and your people to recognize and acknowledge the needs of the whole rather than focusing on your own personal (and we have to say, somewhat selfish) desire for the atmosphere of your native planet.

Sometimes, a commitment to inclusion comes with the acceptance of a hard truth: if

your homeland had been as hospitable as you claim, you would not be here.

Thus, I am afraid that your request for an additional ration of oxygen has been denied. We have painstakingly constructed an atmosphere based on the most common requirements of our inhabitants, a very carefully developed mix of nitrogen, argon, carbon dioxide, methane and oxygen. I understand that you feel that the level of oxygen, currently set to a volume per cent of 6.9, is “dangerously low”. You have submitted a number of symptoms that you believe have been caused by lack of oxygen, including increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, impaired thinking and reduced coordination. However, we must note that you have previously listed exactly these

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symptoms when you asked for a decrease in the levels of both hydrogen sulfide and carbon monoxide. In short, we feel that your symptoms are inherent to your physical health and would not actually be changed by the variations in the atmosphere that you have repeatedly requested.

We appreciate that the transition period may be difficult. Thank you for entrusting us with your security and health, although, of course, we have to acknowledge there was not much choice. Nevertheless, we have taken a pledge to support each and every refugee currently seeking solace within the hold of

the Spacewise Supertanker. For more information on our pledge, please subscribe to our newsletter, in which we share the programmes and initiatives of the governing body. We are committed to evolving and enhancing our strategies through sharing successes and challenges.

As a part of our strategic programme and accountability systems, we ask for your feedback; in fact, we are reliant on it. As such, we'd like to encourage you to fill in this five-question community-care survey in which you are asked to rank your experiences with us on a scale of one to ten.

It is always a pleasure to hear from our inhabitants.

Most sincerely,
The Mothership.

Sylvia Spruck Wrigley was born in Germany, spent her childhood in California and now lives in Estonia. Her fiction has been nominated for a Nebula and her short stories have been translated into more than a dozen languages. You can find out more about her at <https://intrigue.co.uk>.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Sylvia Spruck Wrigley reveals the inspiration behind *In response to your request for a modification to the atmosphere of break bulk cargo hold 17*.

We are taught that it is important to compromise for healthy relationships at home and at work. Someone who refuses to compromise is described as inflexible and impossible to deal with.

However, I think these past few years have highlighted the risks of always trying to find the middle ground. Often, instead of making everyone happy, compromise can mean that no one is happy. Worse, people in positions of power can insist on a 'compromise' as a way of belittling or dismissing our concerns. How dare we stand up for ourselves, when it could inconvenience others?

This story was inspired by my feeling that we are being asked to lower our expectations and accept an erosion of our privacy, our self-protection and our rights. It gained shape through the many mindless customer service e-mails I seem to receive, with overstated emotion and entreaties to rate, rank and review the service while utterly failing to deal with the actual issue at hand. Finally, I found that by setting it in a fictional future, I could apply it to humanity rather than create an us-and-them dichotomy based on current events.

