

## Lending a helping bubble

Singapore, 2053

The sun is shining brighter than ever, the sky is covered in and the clouds are barely distinguishable. Some are seen walking on the streets with a protective bubble over them while some are seen with only a mask on.

Clara is getting ready to leave the house. She calls for Rachel, her virtual assistant device.

“Rachel play the news for me”

Her television turns on and the newscaster is reporting on the weather.

“In today's weather report, the average PSI level of the entire Singapore has reached 500, increasing by 10% as compared to last week. The haze is predicted to worsen within the following weeks as more forest fires occur. Temperature has reached its highest of 50 degree celsius. Everyone is advised to stay indoors where aircons are available. Reporting next, prices of protective bubbles are increasing, some sold as high as \$10,000 as the demand for it increases...”

“Fifty degrees...” Clara sighs. She gets dressed and is about to leave the house. She steps into her protective bubble, sitting right in front of her doorstep. She sets the temperature to 18°C and turns on the humidifier in the bubble. She turns on her music and leaves the house, well protected inside the bubble. As she leaves, the electricity in her house turns off. She steps into a tube, which automatically teleports her to the ground level.

Clara is jamming to her music while walking along the street with her protective bubble around her. Several people around her have their own bubble around them. She looks up and sees vehicles and people with bubbles flying about.

“When can I afford my flying protective bubble...” She lets out a deep sigh. She heads into a food store.

The store is unmanned. Behind the counter is a bunch of machines cooking the food. She orders a vegan chicken meal and the food is ready within seconds. She presses the ‘grab’ function on her bubble. The bubble detects the food and transports the bag into the bubble. She leaves the store as the gantry automatically deducts money from her e-wallet.

Clara is savouring her food while walking home. All of a sudden, she hears someone shouting from behind.

“MY BUBBLE! WHY YOU TAKE MY BUBBLE!”

Clara turns around and sees a guy in his 20s covering his mouth with his clothes while chasing after an old man inside a bubble. The old man tries to get away as fast as he can but the guy catches up. He throws the old man out of the bubble and walks away inside his bubble angrily.

The old man lies on the floor, coughing. Everyone is minding their own business, ignoring the commotion. Clara walks up to the old man, concerned.

“Uncle, you ok?”

The old man continues coughing.

“Uncle, I let you into my bubble okay?”

Clara presses on the ‘grab’ button and the old man is transported into the bubble. The old man catches his breath.

“Uncle, where do you stay? I bring you home.”

The old man points towards the run-down building in the corner. They both walk towards it.

As they walk towards the building, several people are seen lying unconscious on the ground, sweating buckets. Clara is shocked at what she has seen. She enters the building that is not air-conditioned, unlike what her house is. There is no teleporting device there either.

“My house is at the third level.”

“Uncle... where’s the teleporting?”

“What teleporting? We use stairs.” The old man points at the flight of stairs at the corner.

Clara is taken aback. She has only seen this type of building in her grandmother’s photo gallery.

They both slowly climb up the stairs. Clara is panting heavily. She has never walked up vertically before.

The old man leaves the bubble. He takes out his keys and opens the door. Clara enters, still inside her bubble.

The house is not air-conditioned. Windows are closed shut and the rusty fan is running at full speed. An old woman is lying on the sofa.

“Ah girl, can you let my wife use your bubble for a while? She hasn't had fresh air in a long time.”

“Yeah sure. You can both use the bubble. I’ll step out for a while.”

“Thank you thank you.”

The old man helps his wife up. Clara exits the bubble and lets the both of them in. The intense heat immediately gets to her. The house was stuffy and the fan was blowing hot wind at her.

She could still smell the haze from the inside.

She thinks to herself, “How do they survive in these conditions...” She turns back and sees the couple happily talking in the bubble. She realises how she has taken her bubble for granted and that the economic inequality was far worse than she thought.

As she went back home, she finally took notice of her surroundings. Not everyone had a bubble like her. There were people on the streets passing out due to the intense heat. Not everyone could afford basic necessities due to inflation. People were rummaging for food below the richer buildings.

Clara wanted to make a change. She wanted to help the poor, just like how her grandma used to. She decides to use her savings for a flying bubble for a greater cause instead. She bought air conditioners and humidifiers for the old man and his neighbour. She bought basic necessities for them too. She realises that most of them lost their jobs to AI and couldn't find a new one.

Clara decided to start a charity organisation that specialised in helping those affected by the weather conditions. She advertised her organisation through the internet. Many people donated their money and necessities. Even those overseas could send their help with the help of AI. Clara's organisation soon gained popularity and she helped improve over 10,000 people's living conditions. These people started volunteering in her organisation, in hopes to help more people. A protective bubble company even offered to sponsor their bubbles to Clara's organisation.

Clara is at the old man's house. The old man is lying down in his air-conditioned room, with oxygen support. The old man thanks Clara.

“Thank you for all your help. Without you, we wouldn't have stayed on for so long.”

Clara smiles. “Thank you for letting me see how the world really is and letting me step out of my personal bubble.”

The old man smiles.

Five years have passed. The weather has not improved. Singapore is hotter than ever and the haze is still present. The economy is still the same. The rich are well protected with the latest AI inventions while the poor are stuck with the outdated, cheap ones. But one thing remains the same, Clara's hope to change the world.

Clara is sitting in front of a group of children who are virtually there, introducing her organisation to them.

“...and that is how this community centre came about. Although we can't change the weather conditions, we can change our living conditions, and others too. Any help would be greatly appreciated. Now that's enough talking, let's take a tour around the centre, shall we?”

Clara stands up and leaves the office. The children tag along.

“This is where all the machines for recuperations are. It provides energy and vitamins for the people who are sitting inside. This is where spare bubbles are stored and this is where...”