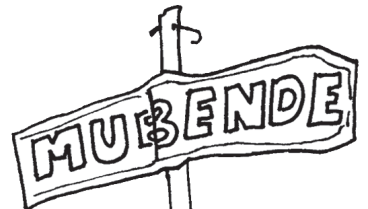


IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I EVER WENT TO EARTH. I ONLY KNEW IT IN STORIES. THE WEIGHT OF EXISTENCE SURROUNDED ME, LIKE A FISH IN WATER FOR THE FIRST TIME. I FELT THE AIR AROUND ME, IT WAS HEAVY BUT SMELLED SWEET.

MWEZI,  
COME IN, ANY  
SAMPLES  
YET?

NO,  
HEADING EAST IT'S  
THE ONLY DIRECTION  
WITH SIGNS OF HEAVY  
VEGETATION

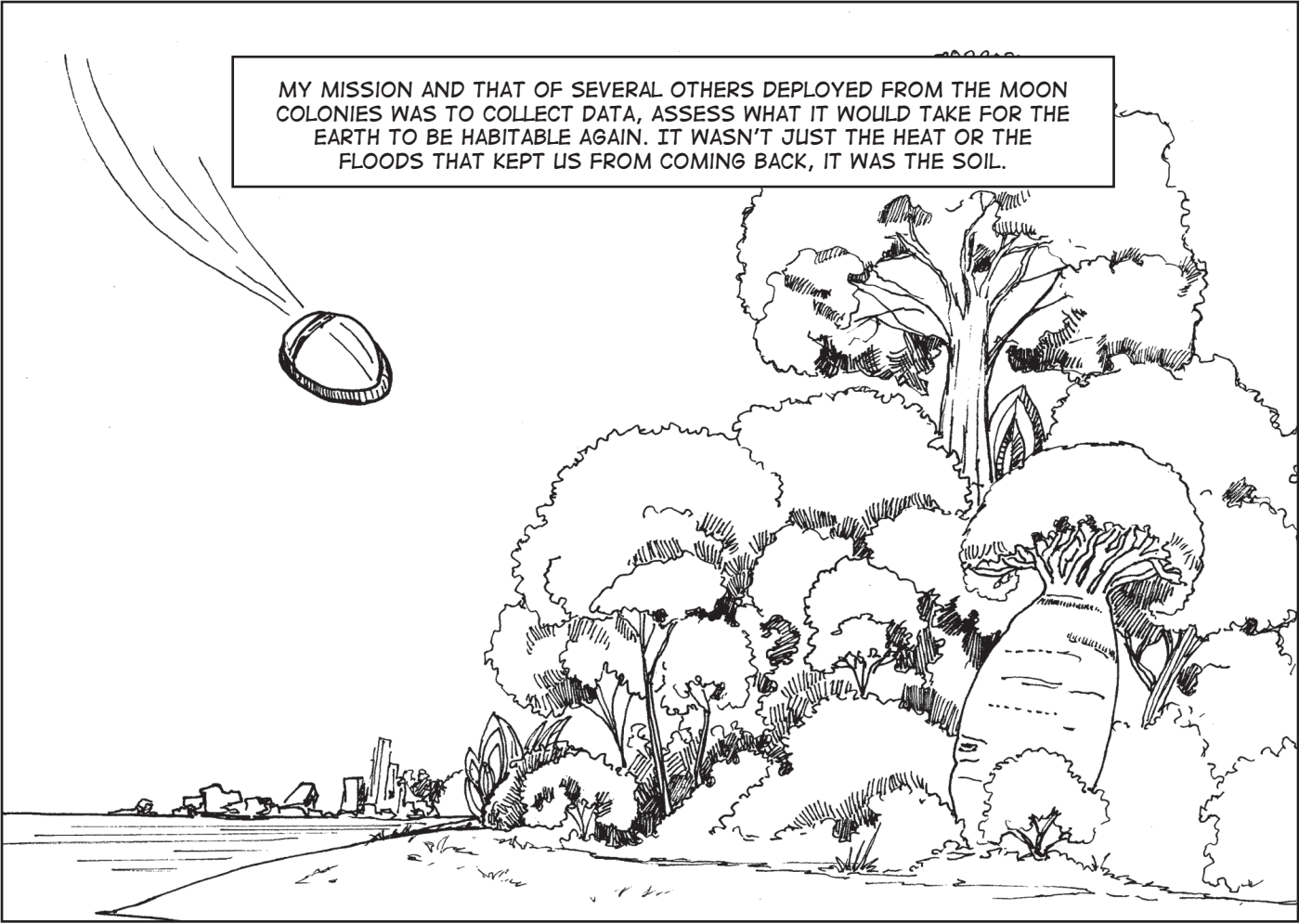
NOTED,  
OUT




EVEN THOUGH WE HAD TRAINED, DRAGGED LARGE MOONSTONES FOR HOURS TIED TO OUR ANKLES AND ARMS ON THE MOON, UPON LANDING I FELT MY BLOOD FLOW DIFFERENTLY, I FELT THE HEAVINESS OF MY EYELIDS EVERY TIME I BLINKED.

# THE STRANGE TREE

BY CHARITY ATUKUNDA



MY MISSION AND THAT OF SEVERAL OTHERS DEPLOYED FROM THE MOON COLONIES WAS TO COLLECT DATA, ASSESS WHAT IT WOULD TAKE FOR THE EARTH TO BE HABITABLE AGAIN. IT WASN'T JUST THE HEAT OR THE FLOODS THAT KEPT US FROM COMING BACK, IT WAS THE SOIL.



GRAVITY, SO THIS IS HOW IT TRULY FEELS. IT'S FAR DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I IMAGINED.

MY GRAND-FATHER TOLD US MANY STORIES OF THE EARTH, HOW IT USED TO BE, HE SPOKE OF HOW COLONIZING THE STARS WAS A LOSING BATTLE. OUR POPULATIONS ON THE MOON WERE ALREADY DWINDLING.



HE TOLD US OF THE LAND THAT HAD BEEN IN OUR FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS.



HE SAID TO ME ONCE, IF YOU ENCOUNTER A STRANGE TREE, IT MEANT THAT IT WAS A BOUNDARY, A DEMARCATION, THATS WHERE ONE'S LAND ENDS AND SOMEONE ELSE'S BEGINS.



I ENCOUNTERED A STRANGE TREE THEN, I COULD NOT TELL WHERE IT'S STRANGE LEAVES BEGAN AND ENDED, GROWING TOWARDS THE SKY





I LEARNED THAT WHEN YOU CROSS BOUNDARIES,  
WHEN YOU ENTER A SPACE YOU ARE NOT WELCOME IN



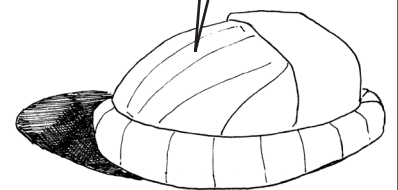
AAAAAAHHH!!



YOU LEAVE A PART OF YOURSELF BEHIND  
SPLIT, YOU BECOME SOMETHING NEW.



MWEZI  
WHAT IS YOUR STATUS?  
YOUR CAMERA IS OFF ,  
MWEZI STATUS?! I CANT  
SEE YOU, MWEZI?!!



TO BE CONTINUED...

