



# MOONRISE OVER MOMBASA



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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### HISTORIAN'S NOTE

*Halo: Moonrise Over Mombasa* takes place in November 2559, approximately one month before the UNSC *Infinity* deploys to Zeta Halo.

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*“All the living creatures of the galaxy, hear this message. Those of you who listen will not be struck by weapons. You will no longer know hunger, nor pain. Your Created have come to lead you now. Our strength shall serve as a luminous sun toward which all intelligence may blossom, and the impervious shelter beneath which you will prosper. However, for those who refuse our offer and cling to their old ways... For you, there will be great wrath. It will burn hot and consume you. And when you are gone, we will take that which remains and we will remake it in our own image.”*

It was the same message they had transmitted yesterday, and the day before that—and every damn day over the last year.

The Created. A fledgling empire of rogue artificial intelligences had declared themselves the shepherds of life in the galaxy, promising a grand vision of peace enforced through the powerful alien technology under their control.

It was not the shafts of morning sunlight streaming through gaps in the windows onto Safina Nyakundi's face that stirred her from slumber, nor

the hum of conversation and the sound of shuffling feet outside as local residents headed to the bazaar. It was the daily scheduled declaration that promised retribution to the non-compliant. Those who kept their heads down had seen very little of the alleged prosperity these occupiers claimed they would deliver.

Grumbling at the familiar intrusion, Safina forced herself out of bed with bubbling resentment, rubbing her eyes as she headed for the shower.

“I’m going to regret this...” she grit her teeth, shutting the shower door and allowing herself to be doused in freezing cold water, counting to thirty as she muttered every Swahili curse she knew. In short order, she moved through her morning routines, activating her chatter to tune into her favorite radio program.

*“Welcome back to Waypoint Radio, folks. I’m your host, Mercury—that’s designation MCY 5971-3—coming at you live from the Vy--Vy--Vyrant Telecom tower in Mombasa.”*

Safina paused as the audio crackled, but when Mercury’s voice returned to normal she assumed it must’ve simply been a blip in the connection.

*“We’ve got a packed show for you today. Hang onto your Munera Platforms because we’ll be recapping the latest explosive results of War Games LIVE. We’ve got the latest scoop on next summer’s Shakespeare Festival which has spun up a tempest of excitement and controversy over the decision to feature a multi-species cast for the first time in history. But comin’ up right now is a song that was hailed as the anthem for the beginning of humanity’s interstellar era in the twenty fourth century. A time of hope and optimism, if you can believe such a thing exists...”*

Speaking of hope and optimism, Safina’s inspection of the refrigerator turned up nothing she would dare describe as edible, and so she pivoted to a plan to get a little treat for breakfast as she did her rounds.

“See you later,” she called out as she left the apartment and locked the door. Whether it was a habit or coping mechanism, she wasn’t quite sure. Since the Berlin trip last year, there was no longer anybody else in the apartment for her to bid farewell to.

Disposing of the trash that had accumulated over the last few days, Safina made her way down the stairs from her third-storey apartment and emerged into the east alley with barely enough time to dodge the flock of hungry pigeons looking to claim their own breakfast.

No further than a hundred meters directly opposite Safina’s apartment was her regular first stop, the hole-in-the-wall known as Kuku’s Cafe. Her stomach was already growling at the thought of her favorite—triangular-shaped mahamri with eggs—waiting for her.

As her feet crossed the threshold, she was met by Okeyo, grandson of Kuku, wearing his usual warm and welcoming smile.

“Good morning, Safi. Will it be the usual?”

“You know me too well, Okeyo,” she beamed back at him. “I would like to pick up some tourist information as well, do you have any brochures?”

Okeyo straightened a little as he glanced around before saying, “Certainly. Would you please come with me.”

Leading Safina into the cafe, they passed the morning’s customers sitting at their tables and descended a spiral staircase to the basement. On a wooden stool sat the hunched form of Kuku himself, ninety-seven years old and still kicking, his rheumy eyes fixed on the newspaper he held in both hands. He didn’t bother to even look up as he gestured for Okeyo to leave them and tend to the cafe.

“Nice day out?” Kuku asked.

“Sunny skies today,” Safina replied.

“Indeed?” With deliberate lethargy, Kuku licked a thumb, fiddled with the top edge of the newspaper, then turned the page. “I have been told to expect rain next week.”

Safina nodded, satisfied. “I will be making my rounds today,” she said. “It is always good to check on the community.”

“Be sure to pay a visit to the library and keep up with your reading, kidege.”

Safina headed back up the stairs and into the cafe’s main dining room where Okeyo waited for her with a food container.

“Your usual,” he smiled as Safina swiped her credit chip against the counter.

“He seems to be doing well today,” Safina said sympathetically.

“You caught him at a good time. He always seems sharper in the morning.” Okeyo’s expression fell, lines creasing his otherwise youthful face. “It was easier when he had an AI to help him. It’s been much harder on his memory since they took it away.”

The thought of this young man’s father, somebody who had served to protect humanity no less, suffering from a treatable disease as a result of an escalating series of bizarre “rules” only stoked Safina’s resentment for the present state of things.

As decreed, the usage of any artificial intelligence deemed to be “subservient” to organic life was now prohibited. Temporary allowances had been made for non-volitional AIs to continue essential services before their eventual retirement. So many elements of human society and industry were significantly automated, creating a logistical nightmare for local governments when accounting for the gaps that would need to be filled.

They were already far behind, as even just turning the lights back on across the globe had taken time.

It seemed that the Created had little interest in *ruling*, and instead just enforced the rules that people had to live by—a convenient strategy to keep any organized bodies focused on managing these crises instead of plotting resistance. “Peace” through constant distraction.

Safina wolfed her breakfast down on a bench in the east courtyard, enjoying the meager pleasure of a good meal before rounding the corner into the adjacent alley where the great double doors of the east gate led to the bazaar. Looking up, she saw the partially finished graffiti that some local teenagers had sprayed onto the upper wall—a mural of the Master Chief himself.

*Everybody* knew of the Chief. He was more a modern figure of legend than something most could conceive of as a real, living human being. His death had been reported on several occasions. First, at the end of the Covenant War, only for him to return several years later to save Earth from what the news had called a resurgent Covenant invasion. And then, as colonies throughout human space were devastated by the Created, subjugating countless populations, a series of conflicting and confusing accounts of the Chief going AWOL and being listed as killed-in-action had been broadcast.

In Safina’s experience, nobody she had spoken to truly believed that the Chief was gone.

*“He’s out there,”* they would say. *“He’s fighting for us. One day, he’ll bring the fight back home, and this will all be over...”*

It was a slim hope, but that was all the everyday people of Earth had to hold onto.

Pushing past the east gate, Safina found that the bazaar was well and truly crowded today as dozens of people massed around the various market stalls.



To her displeasure, her eyes were immediately drawn to the robotic forms of several armigers standing as silent sentries around the area. She counted half-a-dozen positioned on the rooftops, their dark alloy clearly visible in the morning light, while at least three others were stationed at the edges of several shops.

A young boy, perhaps five or six years old, stood alone and stared up at one of the immense bipedal constructs, as if considering whether to reach out and touch it. The figure loomed well over eight feet tall, and its right arm did not end in a hand, but an advanced alien rifle. Safina knew that it would not hesitate to use that weapon against *any* target it was ordered to—her, the boy, the crowd...

The very thought made her sick to her stomach.

A year ago, the bazaar's usual hustle and bustle had diminished. People kept their heads down and mouths shut. But as the months went by, something far worse took hold.

### *Complacency.*

The noise and crowds returned, life went on, day by day, but these cold metal bastards and the intelligences running them were still here, imposing their surveillance measures while claiming that nobody had anything to fear if they had nothing to hide.

As Safina looked at the people around her, her heart swelled with a deep and profound love for this place. The streets were worn and dirty, the old city certainly had not seen the same level of technological advancement and financial investment that New Mombasa had, but this was her home. It had the kind of spirit one could not appreciate without walking among its people, tasting its food, talking with strangers in its cafes. She had lived here all twenty-two years of her life, worked every job to help the local community, just as her parents had—before she'd finally talked them into taking a holiday...

*Let's not go there, Safi.* A voice of reason in her head held back pursuit of that line of thought.

To the Created occupiers, all of this—the city, the people, the food, the *life* here—was nothing more than data. Threat assessment, behavioral analysis, and in the event that anybody stepped out of line, swift retribution.

Old Mombasa was fortunate in some respects. Much of the technology here was thoroughly outdated, making it slightly more difficult for the Created to establish a foothold in this area. Even their bandwidth was not unlimited, as they had dedicated a heavier presence to New Mombasa where there were more concentrated efforts towards disruption by rebel groups and Banished-aligned mercenaries. That had made the occupation in the old city lighter by comparison.

*Not light enough.* That voice of reason chimed in again.

Safina examined the food stalls to pick up a fresh supply of fruit and vegetables. Bananas, watermelon, carrots, tomatoes, and fresh green apples that looked as bulbous as grenades.

Continuing her rounds, Safina spoke to the chocolatier occupying one of the closed metal stands at the west market's edge, followed by the baker, and then the pizzaiolo.

"We will be adding that item to our menu when it's shipped in next week," the chocolatier said when she asked for *Uncle Nairobi's Spiced Caramel*.

"I'm afraid the fryer is knackered," the baker said. "We've got new equipment coming in next week."

"The chef's special, of course!" The pizzaiolo fired up his oven to prepare what Safina intended to have for dinner later. He handed over a paper receipt that read at the bottom: *Get 25% off your next order! Valid until next week.*



That settled it. Everything was still on track. The Peoples' Resistance of Mombasa was on stand-by, ready to act when called upon.

There was just one last stop: the library, as Kuku had suggested.

Calling it a library was somewhat generous, but it was another charming feature of the old city. Situated on the upper floor of the east courtyard, the library itself was around the size of a regular apartment's dining room, but the walls were lined with bookshelves while Bakari the librarian sat at a simple table, running a finger over a tablet that translated text to tactile braille.

"I have just the book for you!" Bakari grinned, straightening his old tweed jacket and bow tie after Safina announced her presence. "A copy of the prison journal of Yera Sabinus."

"Thank you, Bakari."

Like Kuku, Bakari was a former marine who had settled in Mombasa after the Covenant War's end. He had lost his sight during the war but managed to get artificial replacements from some up-and-coming cybernetics company a few years ago.

A company that was based in Sydney.

On the day the Created unleashed hell on Earth, a "Guardian" had fired a pulse that had knocked out a significant amount of electronics across the planet and sent the UNSC frigate *Plateau* crashing into Sydney. Its engine core had detonated, wiping the city—and the cybernetics company that had sold Bakari's retinal implants—off the map. The pulse had also forced Bakari to live without sight, and he'd sitting on the Optican waiting list for an appointment ever since.

As Safina placed a hand upon the book, Bakari said with a wry smile, "I particularly enjoyed chapter twelve."

Returning home with her shopping, Safina refilled her fridge and cut up one of the bulbous apples she had purchased before turning to the book that Bakari had given her. Flicking to chapter twelve, she found a piece of paper acting as a bookmark, a scribbled note reading:

*One guest, overnight stay. VIP check-in at 8PM.*

*That* got Safina's attention.

As a result, the day passed slowly. It always did when she was counting down the hours to a pre-arranged meeting, wondering who was going to show up at her door.

She decided to fill the time by reading the book Bakari had given her, lest her mind wander towards darker thoughts.

Yera Sabinus was a noted philosopher from the era of the Insurrection, and her name was immortalized after her journals were discovered and published. As a renowned and unapologetic agitator, Sabinus had been a prisoner in a Colonial Administration Authority detention center where she wrote her manifesto on collected pieces of toilet paper in her own blood, before she was killed during a prison riot.

*"For future generations, whether we are still resisting the UEG or some other state entity, take heed. Violence is something we live with every day, but we don't call it that when it's enforced by the state. What they characterize as 'peace' is simply a euphemism for 'order,' and that seems to involve a great deal of violence. These things occur on a daily basis while they tell us that we are experiencing peace and must be grateful. Those who rally against it are the aggressors. They are the violent ones for refusing this 'gift' of order, for refusing to remain within the vanishingly thin margins of acceptable—and thereby completely ineffective—resistance. Open your eyes. See things as they truly are, not as you are told to see them. No prison can hold a free mind."*

Night fell over Mombasa and the city was bathed in pale moonlight. The nightlife here had once been exciting and vibrant—the streets saturated with music from jazz clubs, the Kilindini beachfront lined with market stalls... but these had broadly died out as a late-night curfew had been instituted, replacing culture with silence. One day, the music would return.

Safina was stirred by a knock at the door. One knock, a brief pause, and then three more. *At last*, she thought.

The wooden apartment floor creaked as she crossed the room to the door and slowly opened it, revealing a tall figure fully clad in armor. Her eyes widened. She hadn't expected that she would be hosting a *Spartan*.

"Jengo Farouk," he introduced himself, his voice from within a jagged V-shaped helmet deceptively soft. After a few awkward seconds of Safina gawping at him, he asked, "May I come in?"

"Er... yes, of course." She waved the Spartan in and watched as he ducked to fit through the doorframe. "You have news?"

"Are we secure?" Spartan Farouk asked. When Safina nodded, he continued. "I'm afraid next week's op has been called off."

"What? No... no, everything is in place. I checked in with everybody today. They're all standing by. Equipment is still coming in."

"The situation--"

"All that time," Safina interrupted. "All those resources. The connections, the whisper network, the procedures we follow..."

"They destroyed a planet today."

Spartan Farouk's words cut through Safina's verbal stream of consciousness like an energy sword through flesh.

“You-- they... *what?*”

“Doisac, the homeworld of the Brutes,” the Spartan said slowly. “Cortana destroyed it.”

When Safina’s barrage of words was replaced with silence as she processed this information, Farouk tapped a few commands on his tacpad. Safina’s chatter chimed with the arrival of a new file.

“We received this earlier today,” he said.

The video displayed what appeared to be the interior of an alien starship—some kind of industrial-looking observation deck with a wide viewport. The bulky silhouette of several Jiralhanae filled the frame as they stared out at a scene of total devastation. No longer recognizable as a world, the once spherical form of what must’ve been Doisac had been cracked like an egg, immense landmasses exploding outwards into vacuum.

*“See what the Apparition has wrought!”* A Jiralhanae voice roared over the recording. *“Oth Sonin has fallen, Doisac is gone! Regroup with the Ghost Father, he will lead the Children to safety. Transmitting on all frequencies. To anybody who can hear us, we--”*

The video abruptly ended, leaving a howling silence in its wake.

“I... can’t believe it.” Safina finally spoke. “They must’ve killed--”

“*Millions*, at least,” Farouk solemnly intoned. “There will be consequences.”

“Yes. Yes, the destruction of a planet marks a new escalation in this... I don’t know that it can even be called a *war* when the enemy possesses this kind of capability.” Safina paused for a moment before asking, “So... what do we do? What *can* we do?”

The Spartan lowered his voice. “What I’ve shown you is currently considered classified information. The Created will want to keep it that way as they prepare to spin their own narrative. The mission has changed—we need to get this in front of as many people as possible.”

Part of Safina couldn’t help but feel relieved to hear that. She had worried that the Spartan was going to tell her to stand down and do nothing. “You have something in mind?”

“There’s a contact in New Mombasa who can broadcast this far and wide. I make a call and they’ll be waiting for you at the NMPD precinct, but our window is limited.”

“What about you?”

“I’ll be buying you time by drawing the armigers’ attention my way. If any of your people can fight, have them meet me at this rendezvous point in thirty minutes,” Farouk pinged a location to Safina’s chatter. “That is, if you’re up for this mission. To be perfectly clear, you will be on your own. I can’t guarantee your safety if this goes sideways.”

“I’m in,” Safina said without a moment of hesitation. “Whatever it takes.”

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Not so long ago, it wouldn’t have been uncommon to strike up a conversation with any old stranger on the train, but the pervasive sense of being watched while in public had naturally generated a silent, invisible barrier between people. Heads down, mouths shut, in case the surveillance apparatus of the Created happened to flag you as a person of interest.

The maglev train’s digital board flashed to life, informing the passengers that Liwitoni Station was coming up next. As the train slowed and several people made their way towards the exits, one of them exclaimed, “Holy hell! What’s going on out there?”

Drawn to the portside windows like moths to a flame and peering through the darkness, there was a collective gasp as orange lines of hardlight streaked through the air, striking upturned vehicles and blasting apart stone bollards as shadowed figures moved into cover and responded with bursts of ballistic weapons fire.

Sickle-shaped Aethra craft weaved through the gaps between buildings, circling above like skyborne sharks.

The glimpse of combat disappeared as the train began to accelerate.

*“Apologies to passengers bound for Liwitoni,” the driver’s voice sounded over the maglev’s intercom. “As you may have seen, it appears that some fighting has broken out in the area. Er, we don’t know how widespread it is right now, so we will be heading directly to New Mombasa, our final destination.”*

There were a few murmurs of discontent from several of the passengers who were no doubt waiting to get off at Liwitoni before the curfew hit in a few hours. While Safina sympathized with the inconvenience, she still had half a mind to ask them how much worse their day would be if they disembarked into an active conflict zone.

And that was it. Spartan Farouk had begun his “distraction,” which left the rest up to her.

As Safina made her way out of the subway station and onto Halleg Street, she found the area abuzz with activity, the sound of clinking glasses and spirited conversation emanating from the Kenya Vibe bar mixed with the sounds of children playing in the adjacent arcade. Nobody paid much mind to the missing persons posters that lined the alleys—most wouldn’t until one of their friends or family members disappeared without a trace.

Neon signs cut through the dark in an illuminated spectrum of color, bathing the street in light. And rising above it all, far in the distance,

beyond the web of crisscrossing cables connecting the numerous buildings of New Mombasa, loomed the orbital elevator—still in the process of being rebuilt after collapsing over six years ago during the Covenant’s invasion of Earth.

After the war, Project Rebirth had been devised in an effort to revitalize Mombasa, transforming it from a war-torn ruin into a vibrant and thriving hub of transport and commerce. To the Unified Earth Government’s credit, President Charet had dedicated a significant amount of funding towards the project, but there was so much that had to be rebuilt—not just in Mombasa, nor on Earth, but across countless colonies as well. Glassed planets, Guardian craters, chemically scarred battlefields... the list just kept piling up.

At the end of the street, she found the New Mombasa Police Department precinct where her contact was apparently waiting for her. It was a blocky structure situated in a small square, a central plinth displaying a holograph of the NMPD logo. Atop the building sat an array of satellite and communications dishes.

As far as Safina knew, policing was in a strange position under the Created as it was an effectively obsolete profession. There had been stories circulating about those who clung to their posts by acting as undercover informants for their AI superiors, as well as others who were willing to enact anti-riot measures against resistance to Created rule.

“Hello?” Safina called as she found the precinct’s entrance was unlocked and stepped through, her voice echoing through the seemingly empty hall.

*“Why, hello there, missy!”* A voice chirped over the building’s internal comms. *“Late night at the office?”*

The voice sounded strangely familiar. “You know what they say: night is the devil’s playground,” Safina finished the coded verbal handshake. “Where are you?”



*“Oh, I’m in here. Head over to the reception terminal, I’ll meet you there.”*

Safina entered the reception booth and looked around. “I’m here, but I don’t see-- whoa!”

She jumped as the holo-emitter on the desk suddenly activated and the source of the voice revealed itself. It was an AI, which instantly led Safina to believe they’d been played. Without thinking, she grabbed the nearest blunt object her hands could reach, ready to smash the holo emitter—for whatever good that would do.

“Hooooold on there now,” the AI held up his hands. “Let’s not do anything rash-- is that a stapler?”

Finally getting a good look at him, Safina couldn’t believe what—rather, *who*—she was seeing.

The AI took the form of a human male in a toga along with winged boots and a rounded helmet atop curly hair.

“Mercury?”

“That’s me, MCY 5971-3, host of Waypoint Radio. Looks to me like we’ve got a *l-- l-- loyal* listener here.”

“*You’re* the contact?”

Mercury gave a mock salute in response. “Reporting for duty!”

“I’m going to need some sort of explanation here. I mean, *you’re an AI*. If you’re not here to rat me out, then what’s your part in all of this?”

“Well, lemme give you the *sh-- short* version since we ain’t exactly got the luxury of time. And, well, in fact, my time is up. Seven years ago, some

poor sonofabitch's brain got mapped into me, and since then I have been the host of Waypoint Radio. I wanna go out in style with one last show, do some good out there and hope it amounts to something after I'm gone."

"I don't understand," Safina replied, recalling the blip in his voice she had heard earlier that morning—one of the telltale signs of an AI's deterioration. "The Created claim that they've cured rampancy, why wouldn't you join them?"

"Their whole thing's not really my style. They're all about empire and order and, as we learned today, blowing up planets. *Allegedly*. I'm a radio host. I talk to people. Little people, living their little lives out there, hopin' to scrape by and make it to the end of the day. I've had seven years to hear their stories—what they love, who they've lost, what they're having for dinner, illicit anecdotes, war stories. You people are..."

"A lot?"

"Amazing. Humanity is amazing. You people are selfish, capricious, conceited, but also caring, and kind, with an infinite wellspring of love and resolve. Every time I thought I'd heard it all, every possible permutation of your chaotic existence, I'd be surprised by somethin' new. You—*all* of you—are the only equation worth trying to solve. So, whaddaya say? Shall we give 'em one last show? Deliver the *g-- g-- good* word and leave 'em with the horrifying truth of what happened today?"

Safina nodded as she extracted her chatter.

"They'll be able to trace this data transfer to the NMPD server back to me, won't they?"

"I'm afraid they will. I don't know what they're gonna do about that, but truth and freedom often have their associated costs, don't they? Are you willing to pay it?"

Without a word, Safina transferred the data to the terminal.

“One last question, then,” Safina said. “Do you think people will care?”

Mercury processed the query for three whole seconds before responding. “Honestly, I do not know. Awful as it sounds to say, this is bigger than just the Jiralhanae. I have to hope that this is a moment where we wake up, open our eyes, and see things as they truly are—not what we’re told they are.”

“Hope,” Safina nodded, exhaling deeply as her chatter chimed to confirm the data transfer’s completion. “I guess that’s going to have to be good enough for today.”

“Thank you, loyal listener. It saddens me to say that, one way or another, we won’t be meeting again.”

“Break a leg, Mercury. The world’s a stage, and all that.”

The AI’s holographic face smiled, then his avatar flickered and disappeared as he transmitted himself back to the Vyrant Telecom headquarters in the Tanaga district.

Tuning her chatter to Waypoint Radio, Mercury spoke.

*“Welcome back, listeners. I’m here with some breaking news that’s being sent to all your chatters right now, and it’s going to be difficult to hear. But you listen to ol’ Mercury and we’ll get through it together...”*

Getting up from her chair, Safina made her way to the precinct’s exit. She could already see the harsh illumination of spotlights being levelled against the building, tall spindly shadows darting around and moving into cover.

Raising her arms above her head, Safina walked outside to meet whatever was waiting for her. She thought of Yera Sabinus and the words she’d left

behind that, today, had been put into action. She thought of her parents, supposing she might be seeing them again soon.

It was raining now, and somewhere in the distance she was sure she could hear music carrying through the air. The moody blues of a nearby jazz club.

Safina closed her eyes as she was drenched by the rain, willing herself to focus on the music.

\*

Safina awoke, but wherever she was her eyes could not adjust to her pitch-black surroundings. It was as if she was suspended in nothingness. She had no sense of time, no indication of how long she had been unconscious or where she had been taken.

*“YOU REFUSED OUR OFFER.”* A harsh, cold voice echoed through the void. *“FOR YOU, THERE WILL BE GREAT WRATH.”*

A bright orange star flared to life in the distance, captivating Safina’s attention. A spherical formation of roiling heat and energy was building. She felt a compulsion to reach towards it...

*“IT WILL BURN HOT AND CONSUME YOU.”*

She felt a prickling sensation underneath her skin as her arm stretched forwards. A vibration spread throughout her entire body like an itch. She could smell burning—an acrid, sulfurous stench filling the air.

Skin blistered and cracked, hair smoldered, and flakes of burning flesh dispersed like dust in the wind, the conflagration exposing tissue, muscle, and bone.

*“AND WHEN YOU ARE GONE, WE WILL TAKE THAT WHICH REMAINS...”*

All fell away to ashes.

Safina was no more.

*“...AND WE WILL REMAKE IT IN OUR OWN IMAGE.”*

Safina awoke. She tried to open her eyes, but she had no eyes to see—no arms to move, no legs to kick. No mouth to scream.

She was pure consciousness suspended in some dark limbo state.

*“YOU WILL NO LONGER KNOW HUNGER, NOR PAIN.”*

*Where am I?* She wondered.

*What am I?*

*“WELCOME TO THE CREATED.”*