

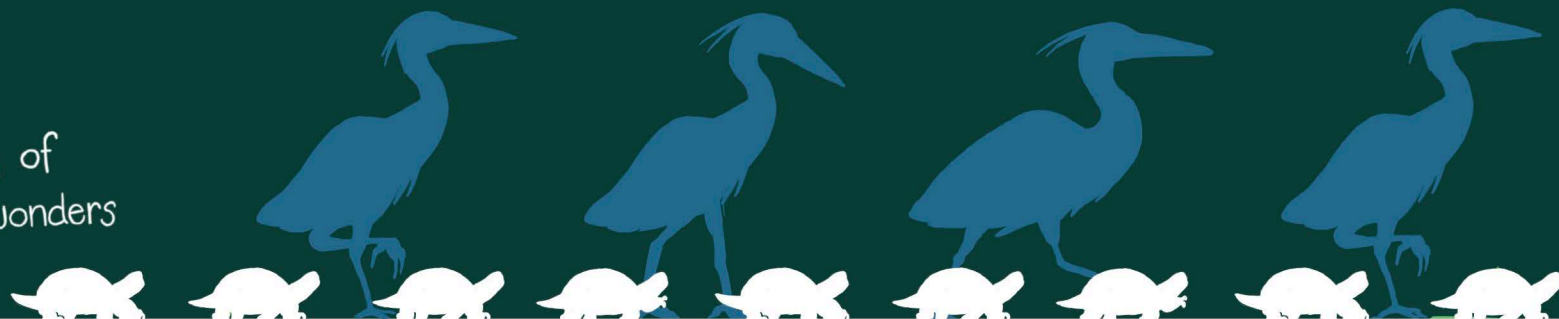
# Captain and Blue

A story of  
wetland wonders



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A story of  
wetland wonders



Katherine Richardson Bruna

Story by Nahant Marsh Education Center Naturalists:

Liv Humphrey  
Alyssa Klauer  
Madeline Kull  
Amy Loving  
Allison Nodurft  
Emily Schallert  
Jimmy Wiebler

With Quad City area naturalists:

Heather Ballou  
Carolina Baptist-Bowers

Art by Natalie Garcia

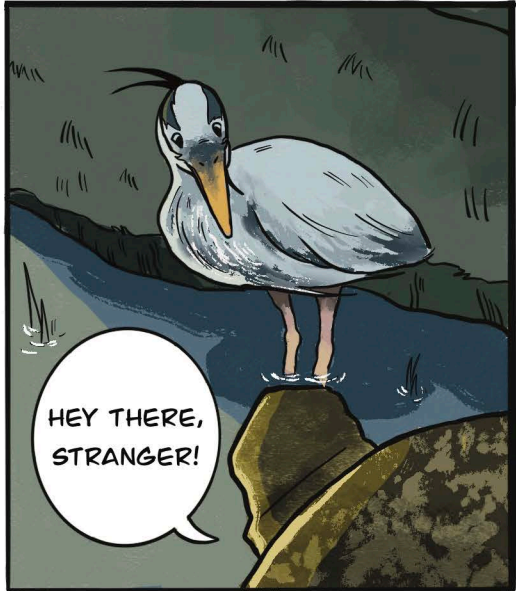
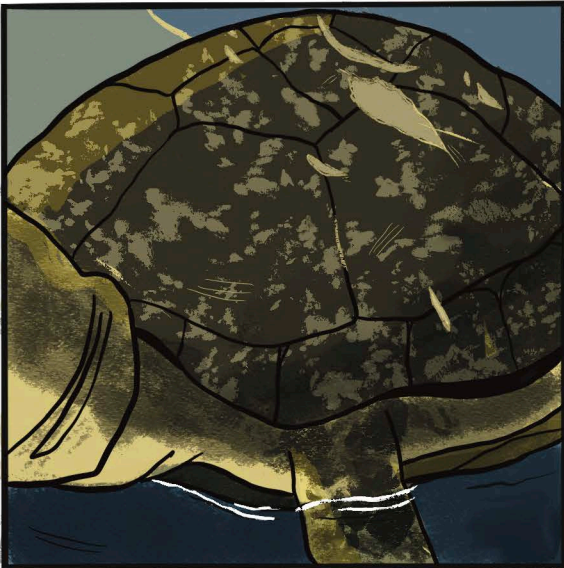
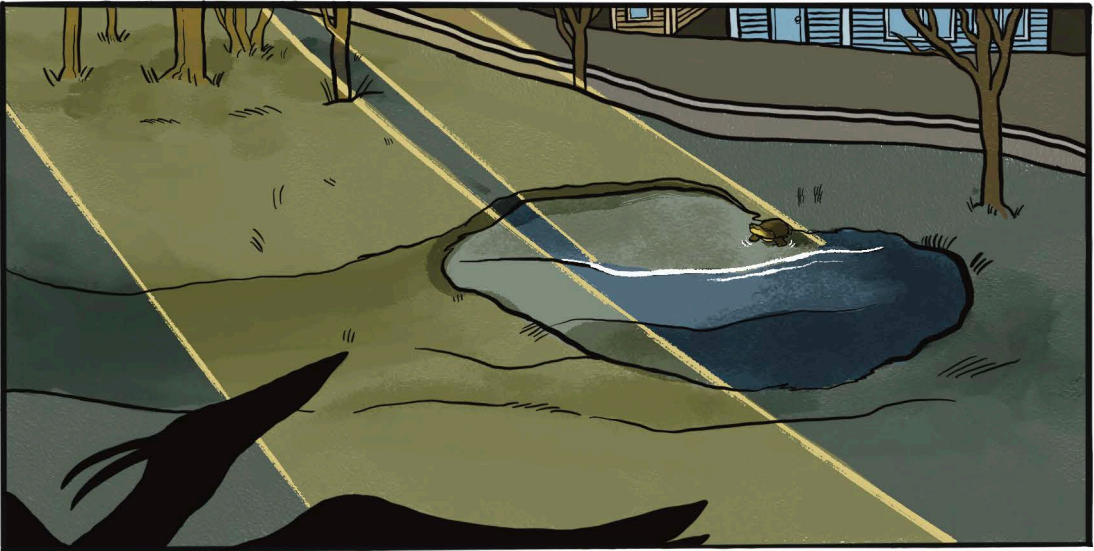
This project was made possible by funding associated with the Iowa State University Rossmann Manatt Faculty Development Award for which Katherine Richardson Bruna was selected in 2024-25. It was undertaken in collaboration with Ulrike Passe's research on social and environmental systems impacting the ecologies of Mississippi River waterways.

## Author's Note

Sherry Turkle writes in her book, *Falling for Science*, about the up-close and personal relationship scientists develop with the subjects they study. While facilitating the creative workshops that led to *Captain and Blue*, it became clear to me that the story the naturalists came to tell about Captain, the 60-year-old resident turtle of Nahant Marsh, is one such science love story. As brought to life here by the talented emerging artist, Natalie Garcia, I hope young readers, too, will fall for Captain, and keep falling further still in their love for science.











BACK IN MY DAY,  
EVERYTHING COEXISTED



I ALWAYS HAD THINGS  
TO EAT,



1

PLACES TO SWIM,



2

AND MY SISTERS ALWAYS HAD  
SAFE PLACES TO LAY THEIR  
EGGS



3



4

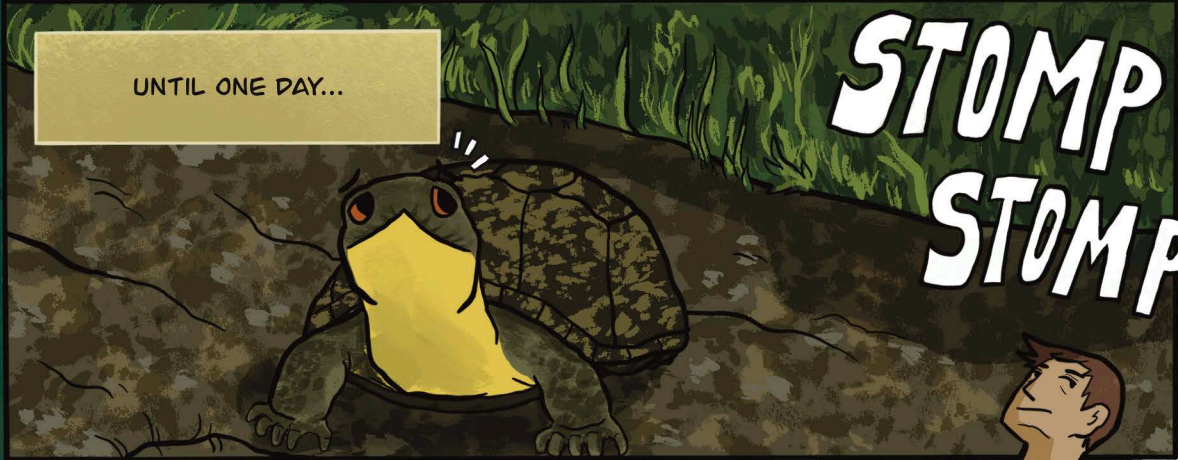
**KEY:**

1. RED-EARED SLIDER
2. NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG
3. RED DARTER
4. FEMALE BLANDING'S TURTLE





THINGS WERE GOOD



UNTIL ONE DAY...

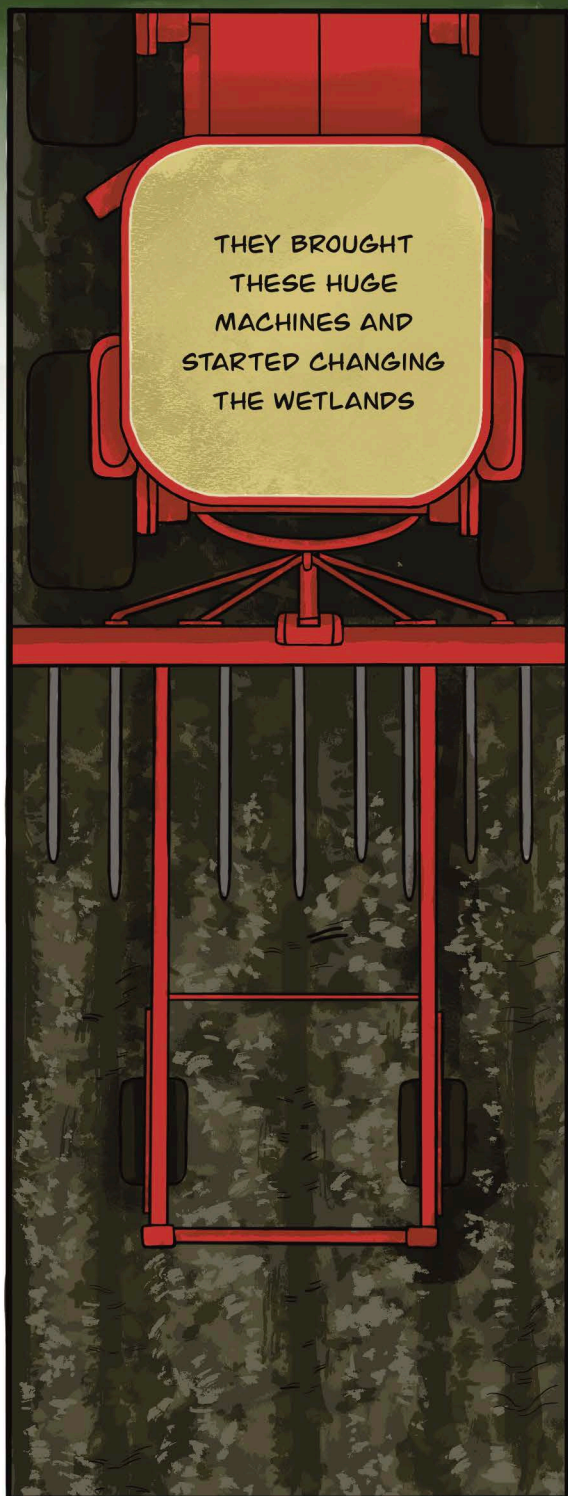
**STOMP  
STOMP**



THESE HUMANS SHOWED UP!

**STOMP**





THEY BROUGHT  
THESE HUGE  
MACHINES AND  
STARTED CHANGING  
THE WETLANDS



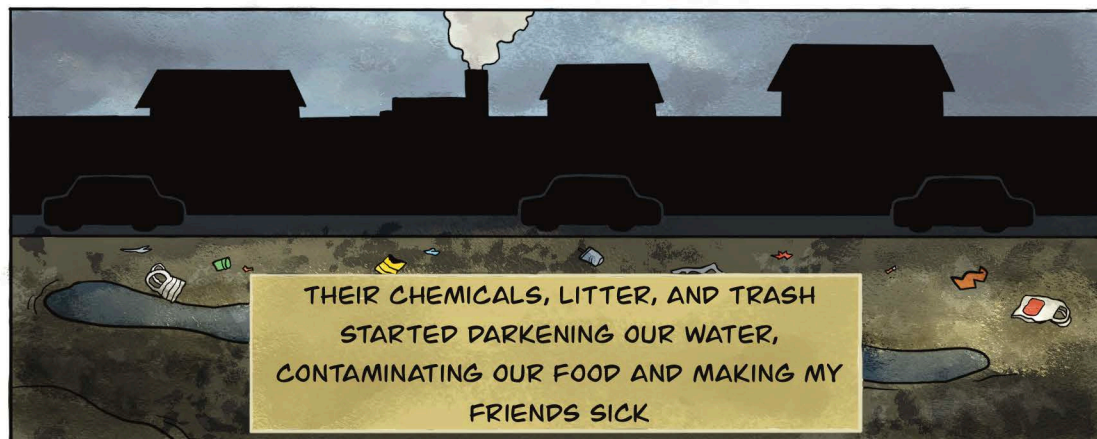
THEN THEY PLANTED  
THEIR OWN FOOD ON THE  
UPLAND WHERE MY  
SISTER AND HER FRIENDS  
USED TO LAY THEIR EGGS



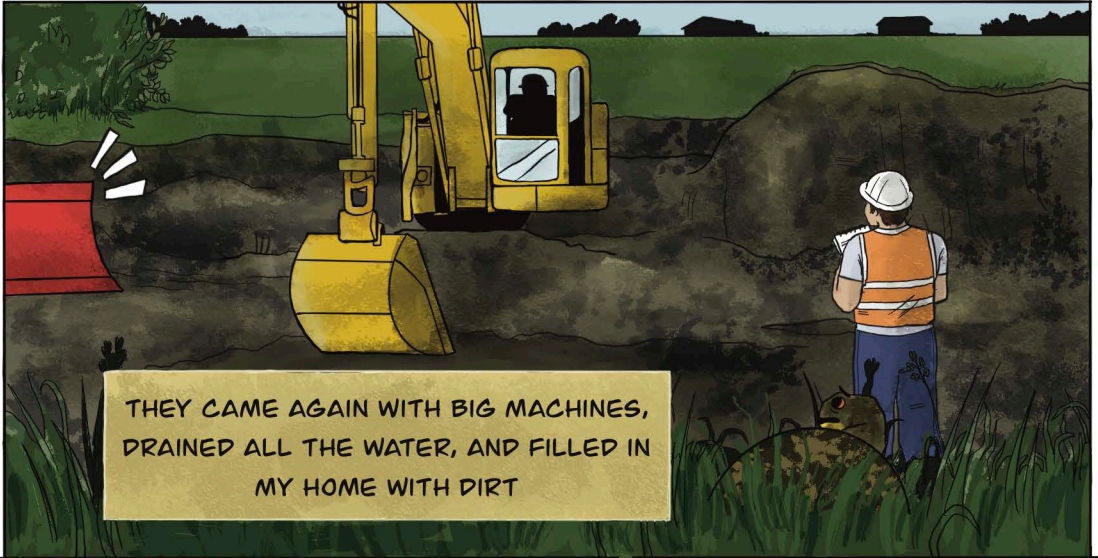
BEFORE WE KNEW IT, EVERYTHING  
STARTED TO CHANGE







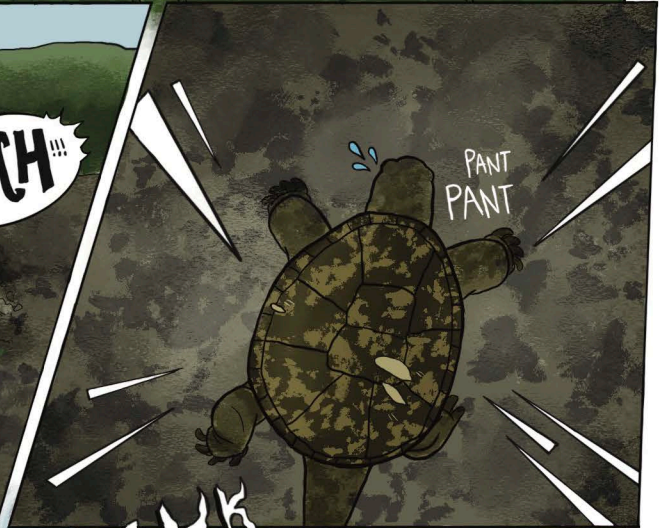




THEY CAME AGAIN WITH BIG MACHINES,  
DRAINED ALL THE WATER, AND FILLED IN  
MY HOME WITH DIRT



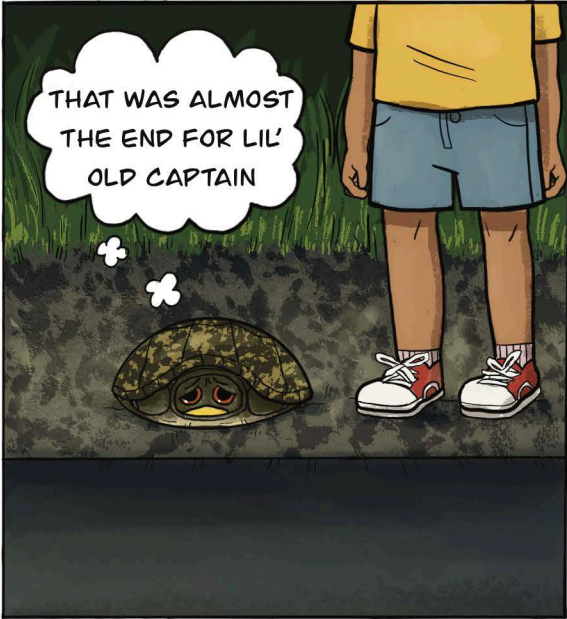
I HAD A COUPLE CLOSE  
CALLS







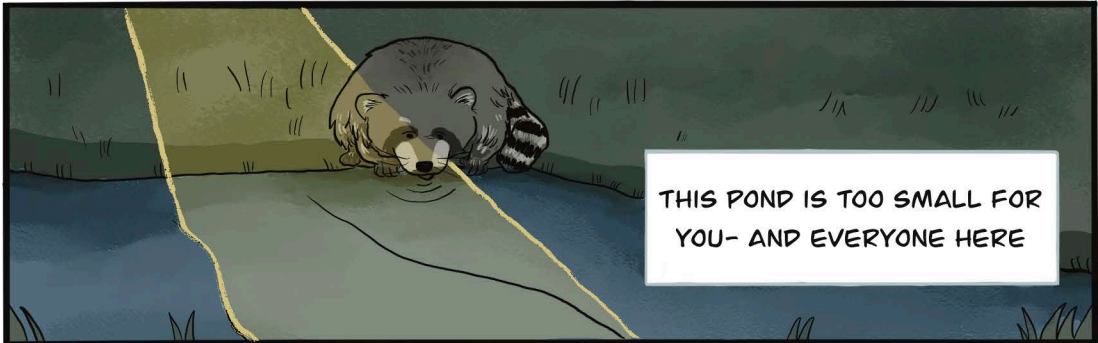




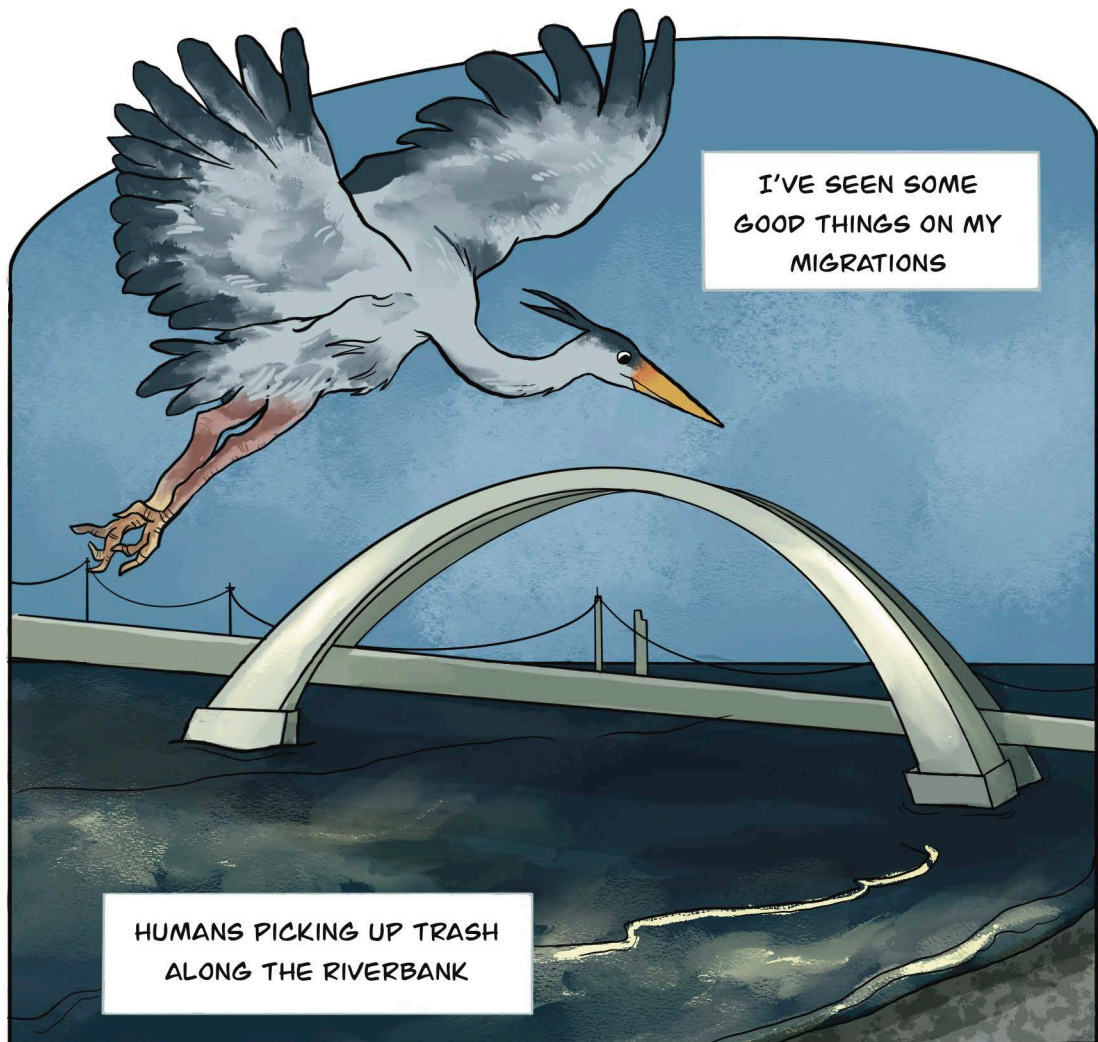


















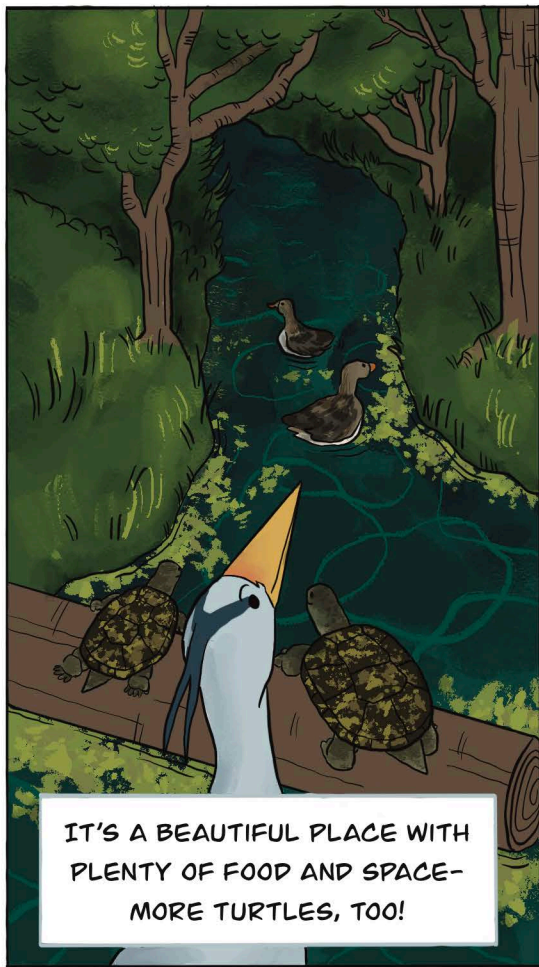
I ALWAYS OVERHEAR THE HUMANS TALKING ABOUT THE MARSH AND TEACHING THE YOUNGER ONES ABOUT US



HMM! SEEMS LIKE THESE HUMANS ARE CHILL



IT'S A BEAUTIFUL PLACE WITH PLENTY OF FOOD AND SPACE- MORE TURTLES, TOO!











HOW FAR  
AWAY IS IT?

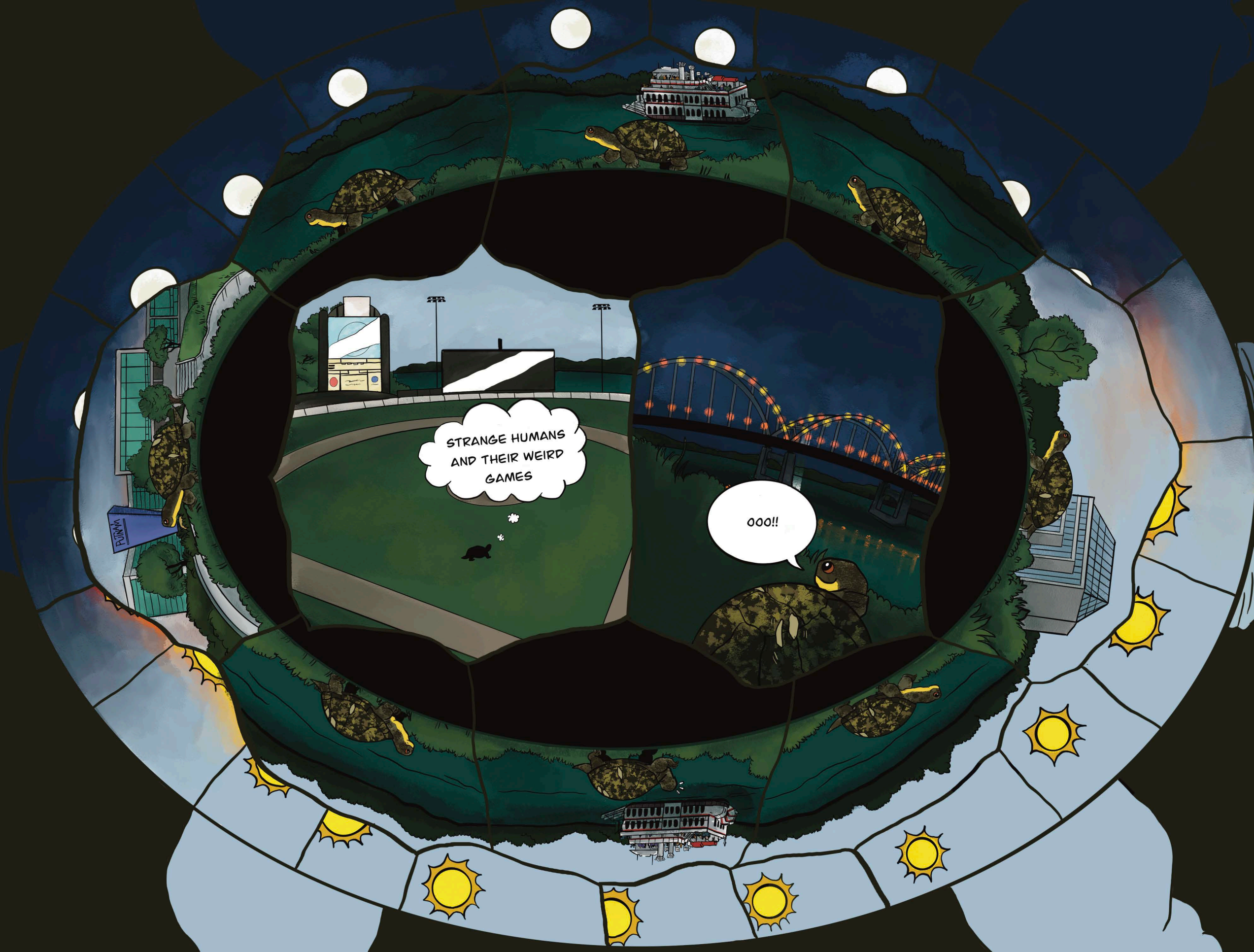


AN HOUR  
OR SO BY  
FLIGHT

I THINK I'LL  
JUST TAKE THE  
LONG WAY

NAHANT





STRANGE HUMANS  
AND THEIR WEIRD  
GAMES

000!!



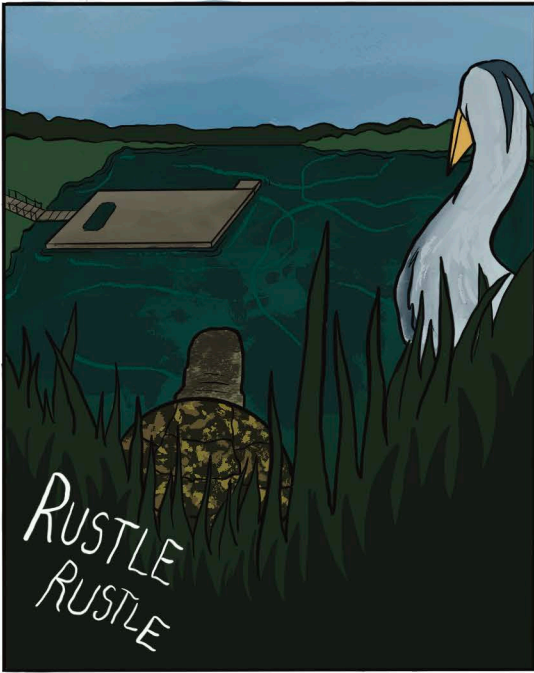
THE NAHANT MARSH EDUCATION CENTER

















US BLANDING'S TURTLES ARE  
CELEBRITIES OVER HERE!



THIS IS A 5-STAR WETLAND,  
AND THE HUMANS ARE  
ALWAYS MAKING SURE THAT  
IT STAYS THAT WAY



THEY'RE ALWAYS PLANTING  
THINGS AND MAKING SURE  
OUR FOOD STAYS SAFE





THEY MAKE  
SURE OUR WATER  
IS SAFE



AND THEY TEACH THE  
LITTLE ONES ABOUT EVERY  
CREATURE IN THE WETLANDS



THEY HAVE THIS WEIRD  
OBSESSION WITH CLEANING  
THE TRASH FROM THE  
MARSH- BUT WE  
DON'T MIND AT ALL



THEY'RE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT  
US- SAYING THAT WE'RE AN  
ENDANGERED SPECIES. THE  
MORE THE WORLD KNOWS ABOUT  
US- THE BETTER







BLUE  
SEEMS TO  
BE HAPPY  
HERE



AND SO DOES EVERYONE ELSE

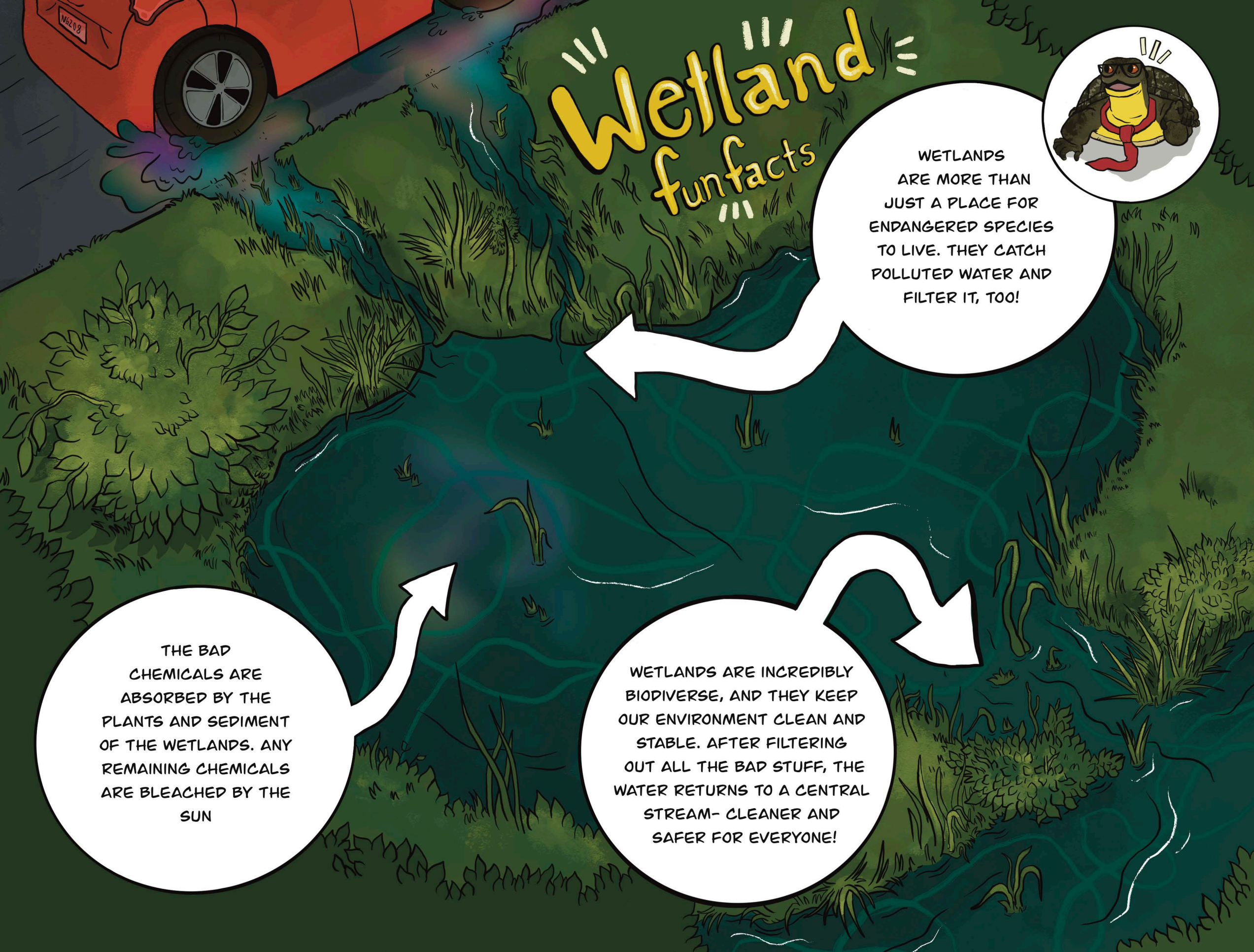


FINALLY...

A PLACE WHERE I CAN REST

The  
End





# Wetland funfacts



WETLANDS  
ARE MORE THAN  
JUST A PLACE FOR  
ENDANGERED SPECIES  
TO LIVE. THEY CATCH  
POLLUTED WATER AND  
FILTER IT, TOO!

THE BAD  
CHEMICALS ARE  
ABSORBED BY THE  
PLANTS AND SEDIMENT  
OF THE WETLANDS. ANY  
REMAINING CHEMICALS  
ARE BLEACHED BY THE  
SUN

WETLANDS ARE INCREDIBLY  
BIODIVERSE, AND THEY KEEP  
OUR ENVIRONMENT CLEAN AND  
STABLE. AFTER FILTERING  
OUT ALL THE BAD STUFF, THE  
WATER RETURNS TO A CENTRAL  
STREAM- CLEANER AND  
SAFER FOR EVERYONE!



Katherine Richardson Bruna is the Willie and Kathleen Robinson ISU 4U Promise Professor in the School of Education at Iowa State University where she applies her training as an educational anthropologist to cultural studies of science education. From the science summer camps she implemented as part of her NIH-funded Urban Ecosystems Project, she created the people- and place-based, inquiry-driven *Mosquitoes & Me* curriculum and its associated *Mosquitoes SUCK!* science comic. A recipient of the 2024-45 Rossmann-Manatt Faculty Development Award at ISU, *Captain & Blue: A Story of Wetland Wonders* is a result of Richardson Bruna's commitment to inter- and trans-disciplinary collaboration in service of accessible and engaging public science communication about complex global challenges. A native Oregonian, she also leads the Oregon Cartoon Project, which is how she met Natalie Garcia, the gifted artist who brings Captain's story to life in these pages.

Nahant Marsh Education Center is a 382-acre wetland preserve located along the Mississippi River in Davenport, Iowa. Its team of naturalists work to protect the wetlands and the species it houses while undertaking important environmental research and education. Nahant Marsh naturalists, as well as others from the Quad Cities area, worked with Richardson Bruna to develop the science storyline that became *Captain & Blue*. The main character "Captain" is inspired by the real-life Captain who is a 60-year old Blanding's Turtle animal ambassador who lives at the Nahant Marsh Education Center.

Natalie Garcia is a cartoonist and illustrator based in Eugene, Oregon. They earned a B.A. in Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies with a minor in Comic Studies from the University of Oregon. In 2023, Garcia created the educational comic, *The Bionic Eye*, under the University of Oregon's Science and Comics Initiative. As the 2024-25 Anne Elizabeth Richardson Artist-in-Residence, Garcia created *Isa's Dreams*, highlighting Oregon's Latino history. Born and raised in rural southern Oregon, they make comics that center belonging, visibility, and joy, while inviting young readers of color to feel seen and uplifted.

Ulrike Passe is a Professor of Architecture at Iowa State University. She is an internationally recognized scholar of environmental modeling and sustainable systems. She leads a research team which is developing new strategies to overcome interconnected social, environmental, and technological challenges along the Mississippi River Basin. Passe's research and connection to Nahant Marsh provided context for the science translation work of *Captain & Blue*.



*Captain and Blue: A Story of Wetland Wonders* follows the life of Captain, a Blanding's Turtle struggling to find a new place to call home after his habitat is destroyed. Along his journey, he reunites with an old friend, a Great Blue Heron named Blue, who helps him see the world from a new perspective and guides him toward a safe haven: the Nahant Marsh Education Center.

The path is full of challenges for a small turtle, but Captain is determined, curious, and braver than he realizes. With Blue's help and a little luck along the way, Captain discovers not only a new home, but how people work hard to restore wetlands, protect wildlife, and keep special places like the Nahant Marsh thriving for generations to come.

