

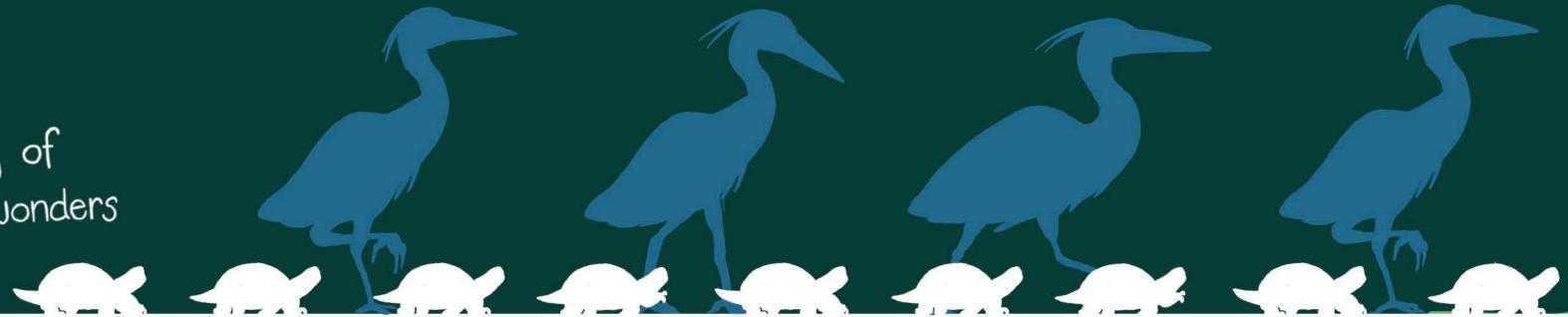
Captain and Blue

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.







I ALWAYS HAD THINGS
TO EAT,

1



PLACES TO SWIM,

2



3



AND MY SISTERS ALWAYS HAD
SAFE PLACES TO LAY THEIR
EGGS

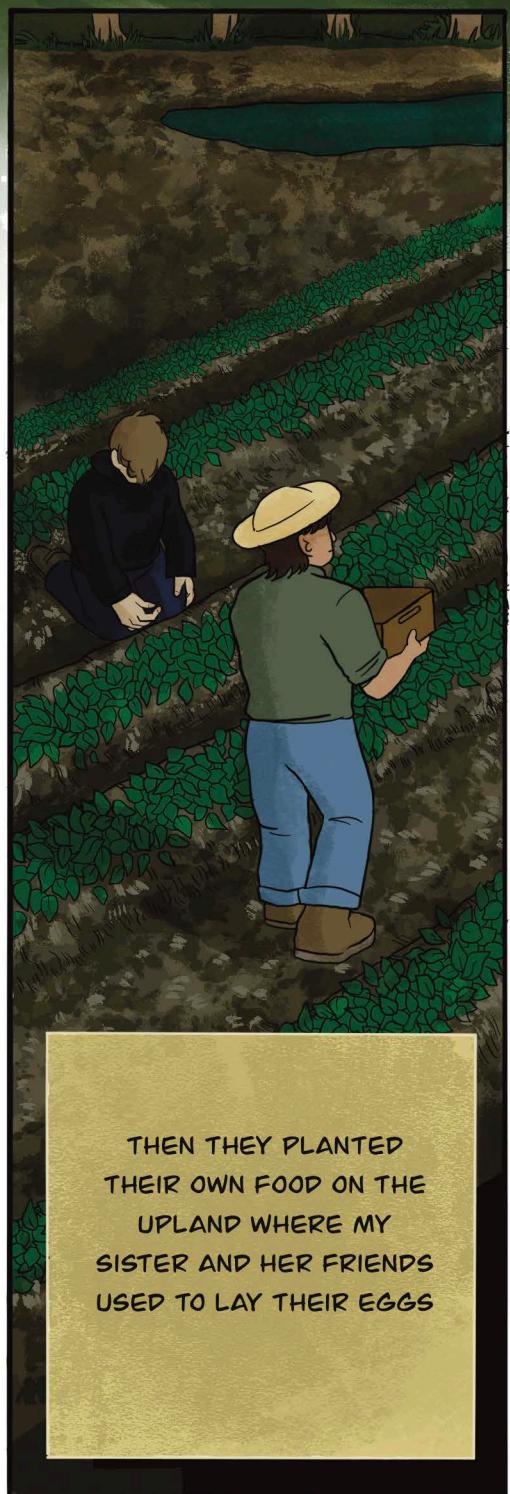
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KEY:

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





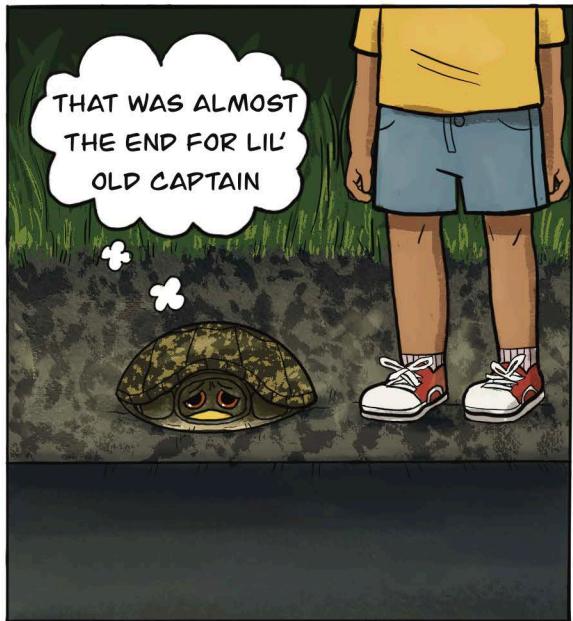
A man wearing a white hard hat and an orange t-shirt is driving a red tractor. He is positioned in the center of the frame, facing away from the viewer. The tractor is moving through a field of tall green grass. The background is a dark, textured surface with two white diagonal lines running across it, suggesting a road or path.

BEFORE WE KNEW IT, EVERYTHING
STARTED TO CHANGE













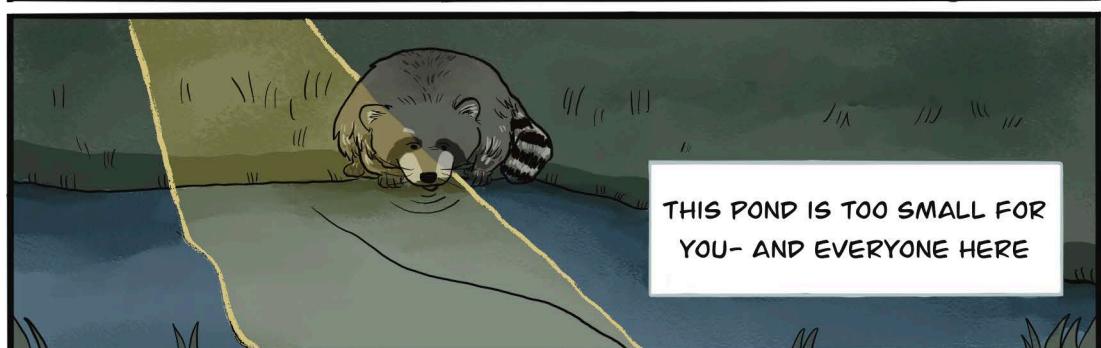
THEY PUT ME BACK
ON MY PATH, AND I
FOUND THIS POND.
I'VE BEEN HERE
EVER SINCE



I SEE... IT MUST BE
DIFFICULT IF YOU CAN'T
FLY AWAY



I'M GLAD YOU FOUND
SAFETY... BUT...



THIS POND IS TOO SMALL FOR
YOU- AND EVERYONE HERE



YOU DESERVE BETTER, MY
FRIEND



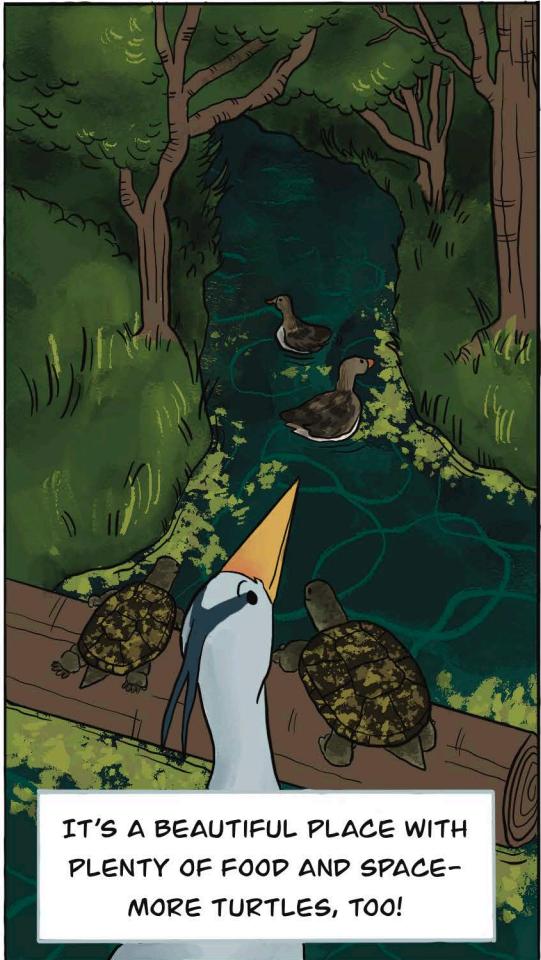
I'VE SEEN SOME
GOOD THINGS ON MY
MIGRATIONS

HUMANS PICKING UP TRASH
ALONG THE RIVERBANK





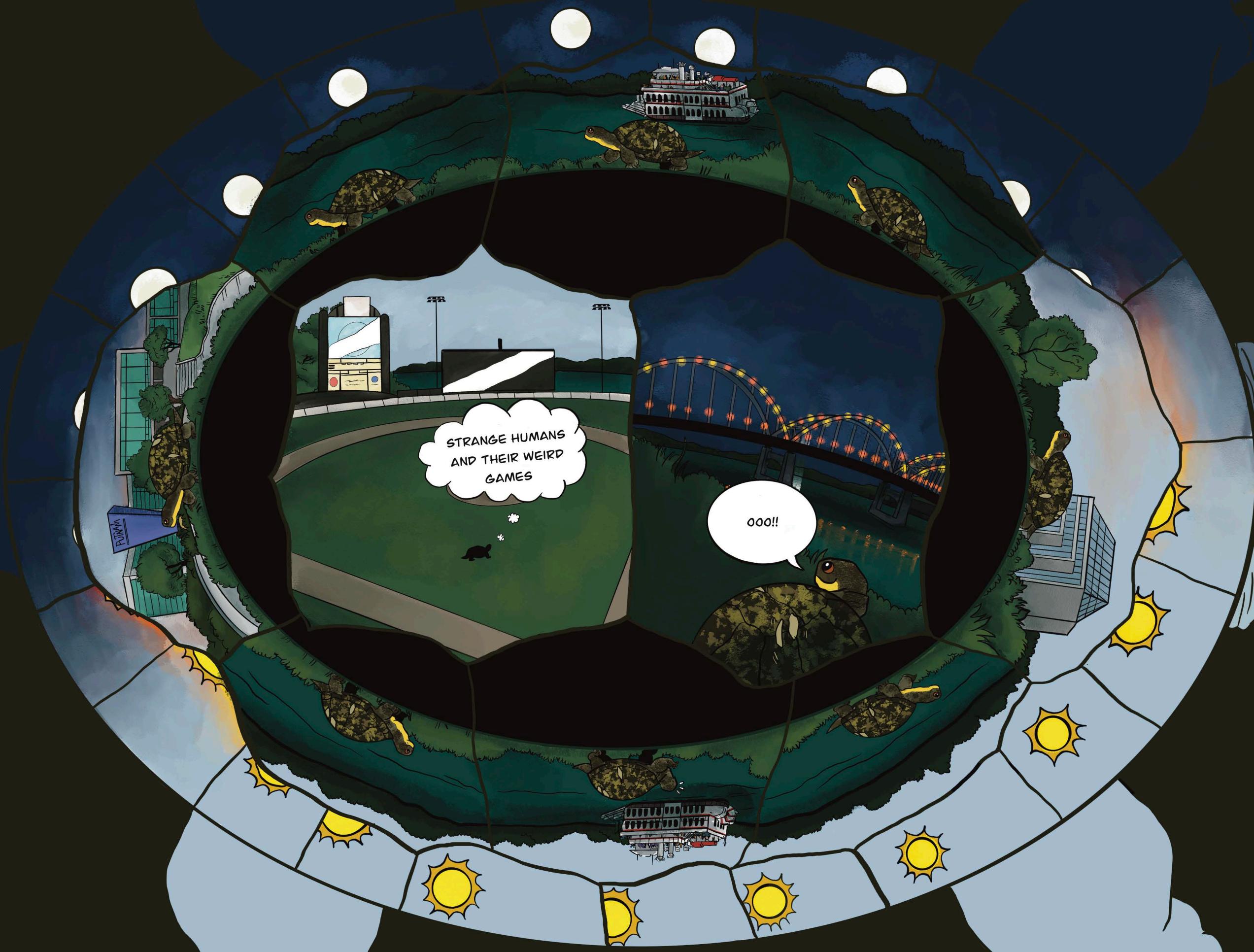
I ALWAYS OVERHEAR THE HUMANS TALKING ABOUT THE MARSH AND TEACHING THE YOUNGER ONES ABOUT US



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







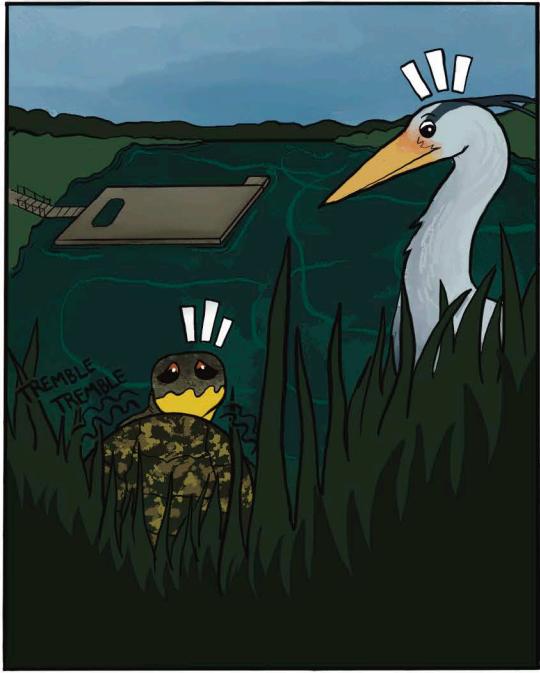
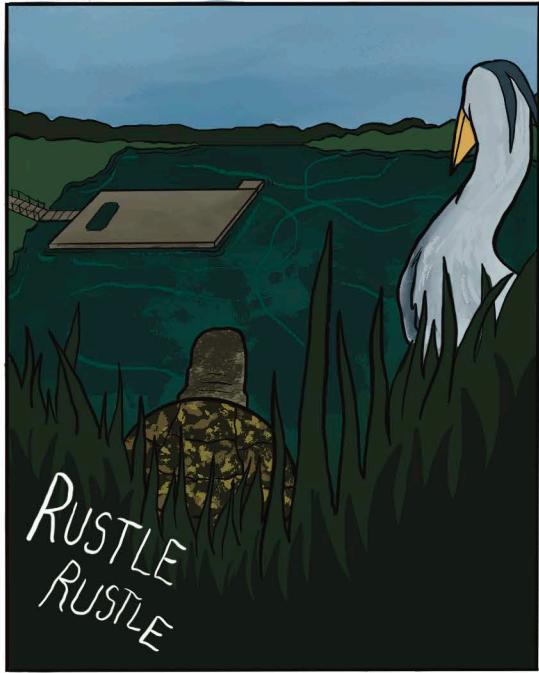
STRANGE HUMANS
AND THEIR WEIRD
GAMES

OOO!!

THE NAHANT MARSH EDUCATION CENTER



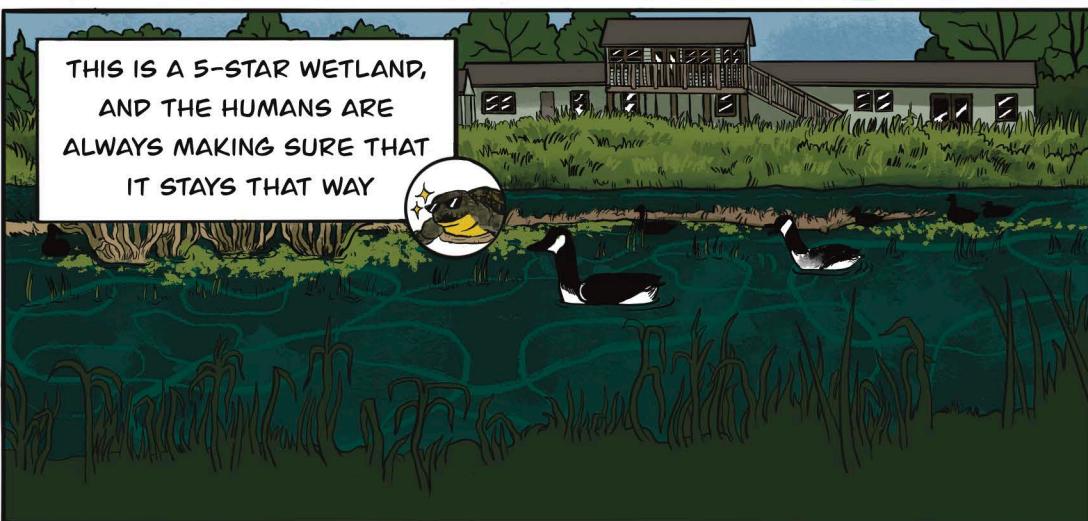








US BLANDING'S TURTLES ARE
CELEBRITIES OVER HERE!

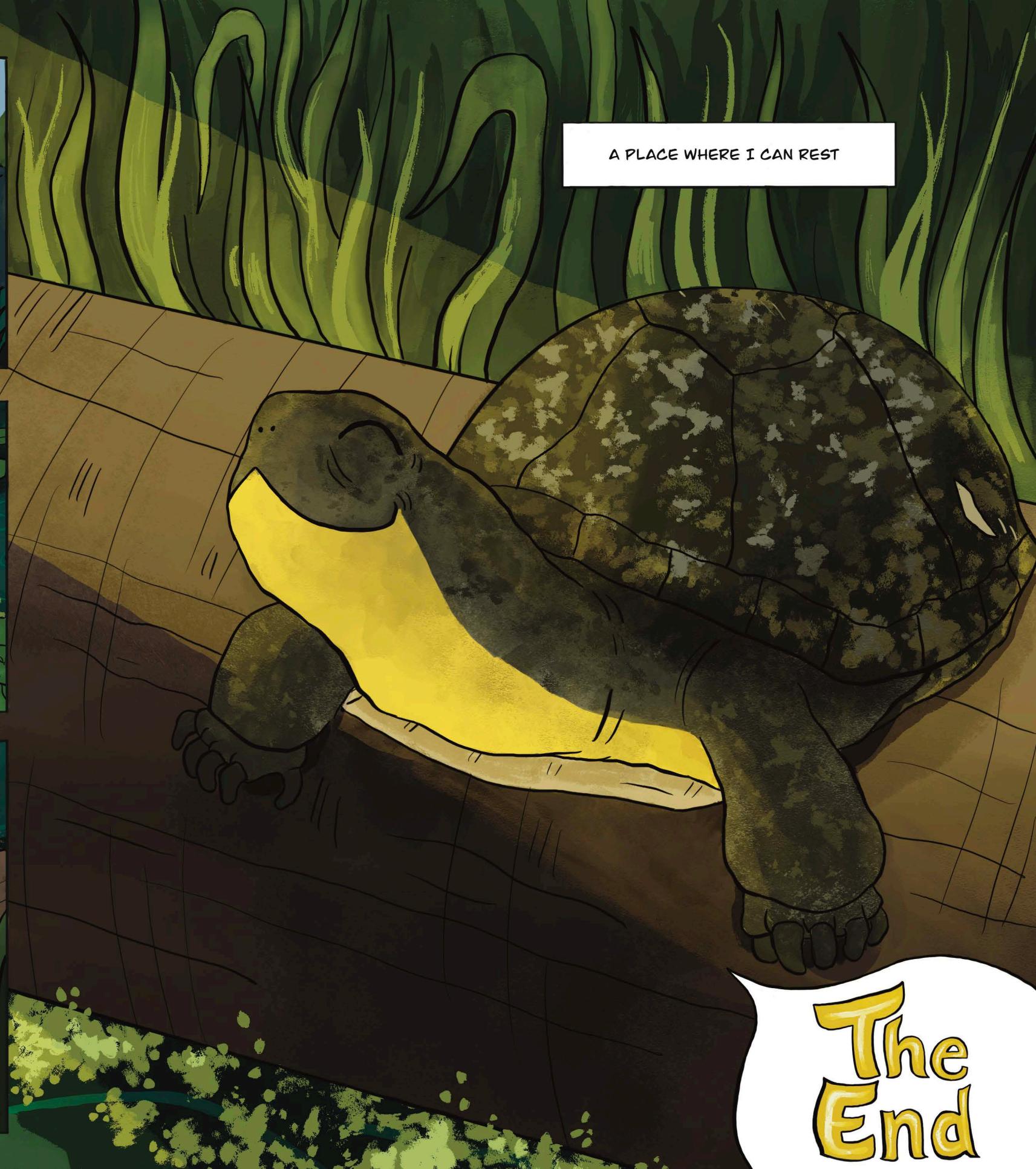


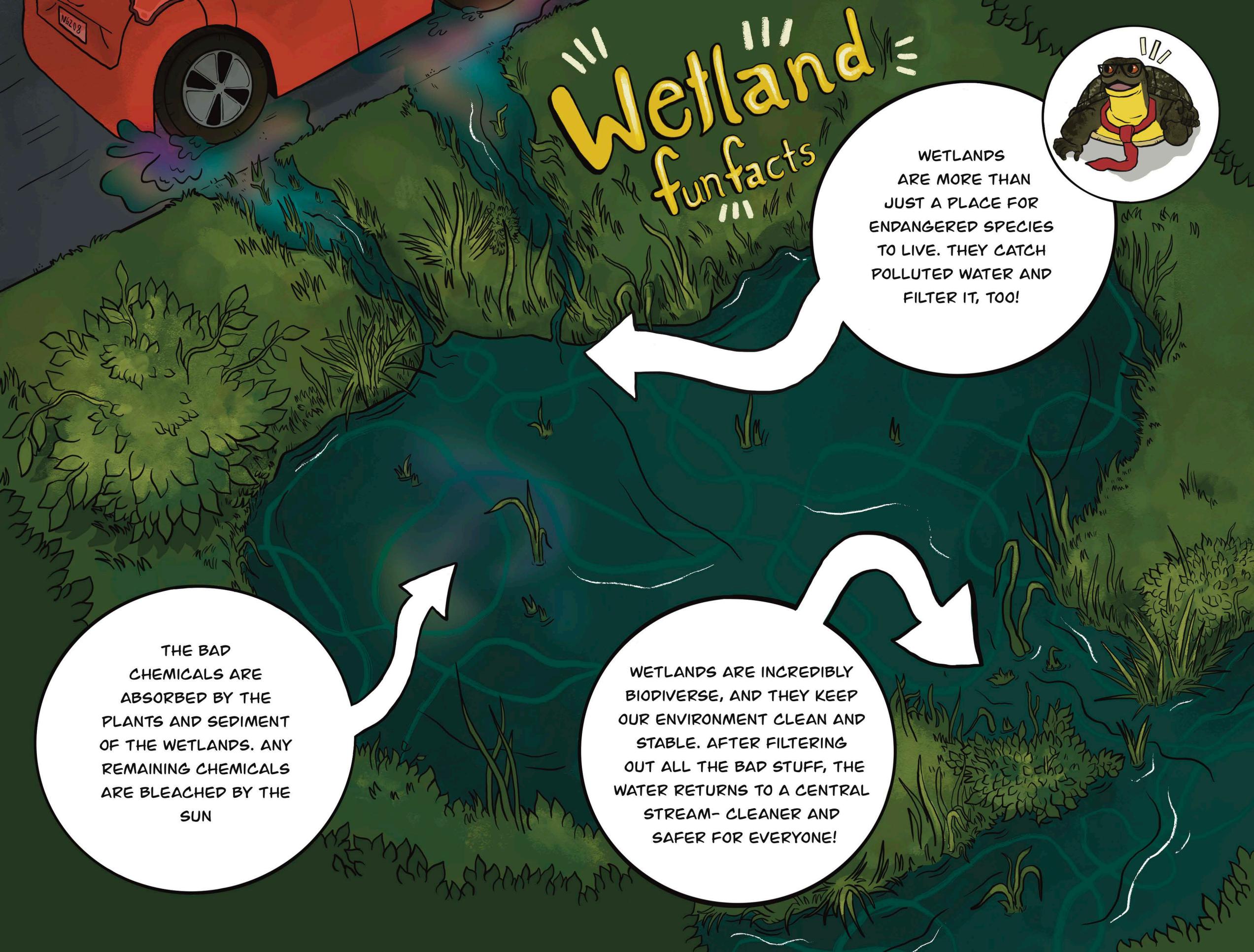
THIS IS A 5-STAR WETLAND,
AND THE HUMANS ARE
ALWAYS MAKING SURE THAT
IT STAYS THAT WAY



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







Wetland fun facts

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!

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



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.

