



COMICS BEYOND SIGHT:

Innovations in Accessible Comics for Blind & Low Vision Readers

Comics are a major form of popular culture and increasingly called upon as vehicles for conveying information from health to education, and central to literacy development for young readers. Yet for people who are blind or low vision, there are very few means of accessing the comics form available today. This exhibition showcases the international efforts of innovators in this realm, assembled by the Accessible Comics Collective at San Francisco State University, with the expertise of blind access professionals guiding the field forward. Whether audio, tactile, or technologically mediated, these explorations in accessible comics raise bigger questions: What makes a comic a comic? How far from the original art form can a verbal translation stray while still honoring the artist's work? We invite you to explore, touch, listen and also question how you might participate in making more comics accessible in the future.

COMICS BEYOND SIGHT

A Highly Visual Case for Blind Access
 Idea/Words: NICK SOUSANIS & EMILY BEITIKS
 Drawings: NICK SOUSANIS

COMICS TAKE US PLACES.

THOSE PLACES ARE CLOSED OFF.

HOW MIGHT COMICS BE MADE ACCESSIBLE FOR BLIND AND LOW VISION READERS?

COMICS ARE A DECEPTIVELY COMPLEX NETWORK, ELEMENTS INTERACTING IN LINEAR AND NON-LINEAR WAYS, EVEN

AND SOMETIMES VISUAL

THAT THIS MEANS IS A VISUAL CONCEPT

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.

ACCESS IS NECESSARILY MESSY.

EACH PERSON'S NEEDS AND PREFERENCES VARY.

CONSIDER, PUTTING AN IMAGE INTO WORDS:

MINIMALIST
 A masked caped figure says "Lights out!" Below, three figures on the street: a person says "Not him!" Another in cat costume, says, "mmm... I need my bag of tricks" and another figure says, "IDEA: RUN!"

POETIC LICENSE
 A dark night in an urban setting, our chiseled superhero, Blackout, descends from the sky, his black cape filling the frame like open wings as he drops his catchphrase, "Lights out!" The first villain, his face showing his disdain for Blackout, says "Not him!" But Felixa the catwoman shows no signs of fear, as she pulls her carpet bag and says, "mmm... need my bag of tricks..." A third member of the crew, a dapper man whose outfit is patterned with lightbulbs, steadies his bowler hat, and with heavy set eyes, he quips, "IDEA: RUN!"

FOR THE ART LOVER
 At the center top, a superhero fills the space illustrated in the aesthetic style of superheroes from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Blackout wears a mask shaped with a great horned silhouette. His etched lines and shading radiate darkness out of his body through the extension of his cape. A man with a tight grimace, reacts to Blackout. "Not him!" moans from the sack slung over his shoulder after a spur-shaped weapon has pierced his bag. A woman with a pointy chin in a cat bodysuit, inspired by the 1920s animated art of Felix the Cat, her face neutral and feminine, says "mmm... need my bag of tricks!" In the bottom right corner, just beginning to exit the frame, a man wears a suit patterned in lightbulbs, a tie with a tiny Felix the cat image on it, and a bowler hat with a lightbulb on it. He has deep sunken eyes surrounded by dark circles, as he glances behind him steadying his hat. "IDEA: RUN!" he says, his word bubble shaped as a lightbulb.

STRIVING FOR OBJECTIVITY
 A masked figure wears a form-fitting bodysuit and black cape that extends out in all sides around him. The hero is flying in the top of the frame above three persons. A crime-presenting person in the center wears a black cat mask and holds a carpet bag purse while saying, "I need my bag of tricks..." A masculine presenting person with a lightbulb on their shirt and money over their shoulder, but not like the hero's cape, has a state. A second person in a suit pattern, wears a lightbulb bowler hat and remarks, "IDEA: RUN!" and like a lightbulb.

RADIO DRAMA
 [Swoosh]
 "Lights out!"
 [leoooooeeoo]
 "Not him!"
 [meow]
 "mmm... I need my bag of tricks..."
 [Lightbulb pull string sound]
 "IDEA: RUN!"

THERE'S NO ONE RIGHT ANSWER.

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK
 Urban scene: a hotel, a clocktower, a cop of three-story buildings. Three figures appear as the oversized eyes' pupils. Her tail is alert and upright as the facial details small and feminine, and she holds a patterned carpet bag. Her word bubble reads: "Need my bag of tricks!" a man wears a suit patterned in lightbulbs, a tie with a tiny Felix the cat image on it, and a bowler hat with a lightbulb on it. He has deep sunken eyes surrounded by dark circles, as he glances behind him steadying his hat. "IDEA: RUN!" he says, his word bubble shaped as a lightbulb. A black cat looks at the fleeing criminals from down below.

“ REFLECTIONS FROM THE BLIND COMMUNITY: When we're talking about making comics accessible, we need to always remember, please, to center the person who this is made for. And that is blind people. Period. -- PODCAST HOST, ACCESS ADVOCATE, AND VOICE ACTOR THOMAS REID ”

Scan to access the digital version of this exhibition, with visual descriptions for all images and accompanying audio:

This physical comic created by Nick Sousanis and Emily Beitiks with accompanying audio track for MIT Technology Review, provides an overview of the approaches and challenges of translating such a highly visual medium into non-visual forms, and its accessible version sought to demonstrate how this could be possible, even with the complex artistic style featured here.

Scan to access the descriptive audio!

Audio Adaptations

Assistive Technologies

Tactile Renderings

New Horizons TO BE EXPLORED.

KEY Nothing about us without us.

THERE'S NO NEAT ONE-TO-ONE MAPPING. FOR INSTANCE, WHAT WORKS VISUALLY MAY NOT TOUCH.

FOR ACCESS IS AN ART OF TRANSLATION - ITS OWN CREATIVE JOURNEY.

THIS COMIC TAKES DELIBERATE ADVANTAGE OF THE VISUAL AFFORDANCES COMICS OFFER -

DENSELY LAYERING IDEAS IN A WAY ONLY COMICS CAN DO.

TO MAKE AN ACCESSIBLE VERSION, WE PRESERVED THE MEANING OF THE DRAWN COMIC - WITH WORDS AND SOUNDS TO FIND ITS OWN PATH.

BOTH AIM TO PROVIDE A DISTINCT EXPERIENCE.

EVERYONE DESERVES ACCESS TO THE PLACES COMICS TAKE US.

WITH MULTIMODAL TOOLS, COMICS CAN GO BEYOND SIGHT!

HERE!

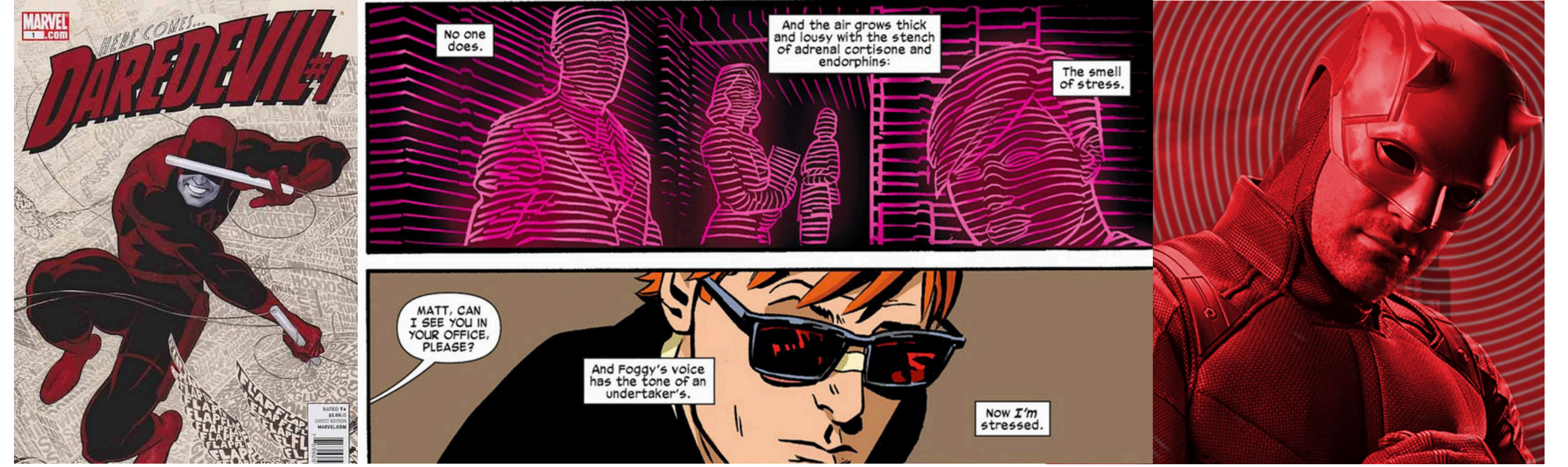
BLIND CHARACTERS IN COMICS

Blind people have appeared inside comics for decades, blindness a problem to be cured with superpowers or a source of tragedy and melodrama. But comics today are evolving!



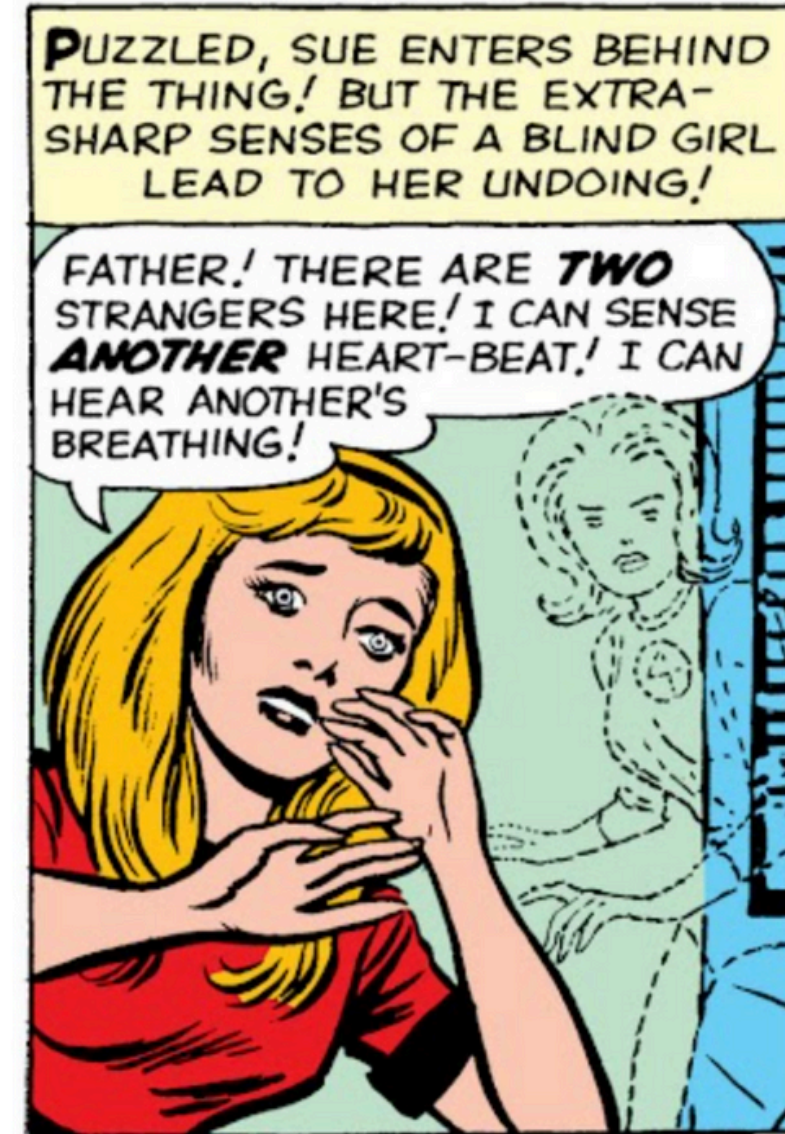
DAREDEVIL (MARVEL COMICS)

The most prominent of blind comics characters, Daredevil first appeared in Marvel Comics in 1964 and has been an ongoing character in his own comics, teamups, as well as film and TV. As a boy, Matt Murdock saves an old man from being hit by a truck but is consequently blinded by a radioactive substance that falls off that truck. The radioactivity not only robs him of his sight but enhances his other senses. As an adult, he becomes the superhero Daredevil.



DR. MID-NITE (DC COMICS)

Often regarded as the first blind super character, Dr. Mid-Nite appeared in 1941 and starred in his own comics as well as the Justice Society of America. Blinded by a criminal's grenade, Dr. Charles McNider discovered he could see in the dark. Arming himself with special goggles to see in daylight, smoke bombs, and a costume, he launched into a life of fighting crime.



ALICIA MASTERS (MARVEL COMICS)

Alicia Masters has been a regular supporting character in the Fantastic Four comics since her first appearance in 1962, and is the longtime love interest of the rocky behemoth member of FF's The Thing. Accidentally blinded at an early age by her supervillain father, but without superpowers, she becomes a sculptor, and her sense of touch and ability to feel a character's interior self has been central to her appearances.

DESTINY (MARVEL COMICS)



Destiny first appeared in 1980 and has been both an enemy and occasional ally to Marvel's X-Men. Destiny's powers of precognition emerged in adolescence and after writing down all the events set to happen in the near future for 13 months, she was left blind.

SHROUD (MARVEL COMICS)



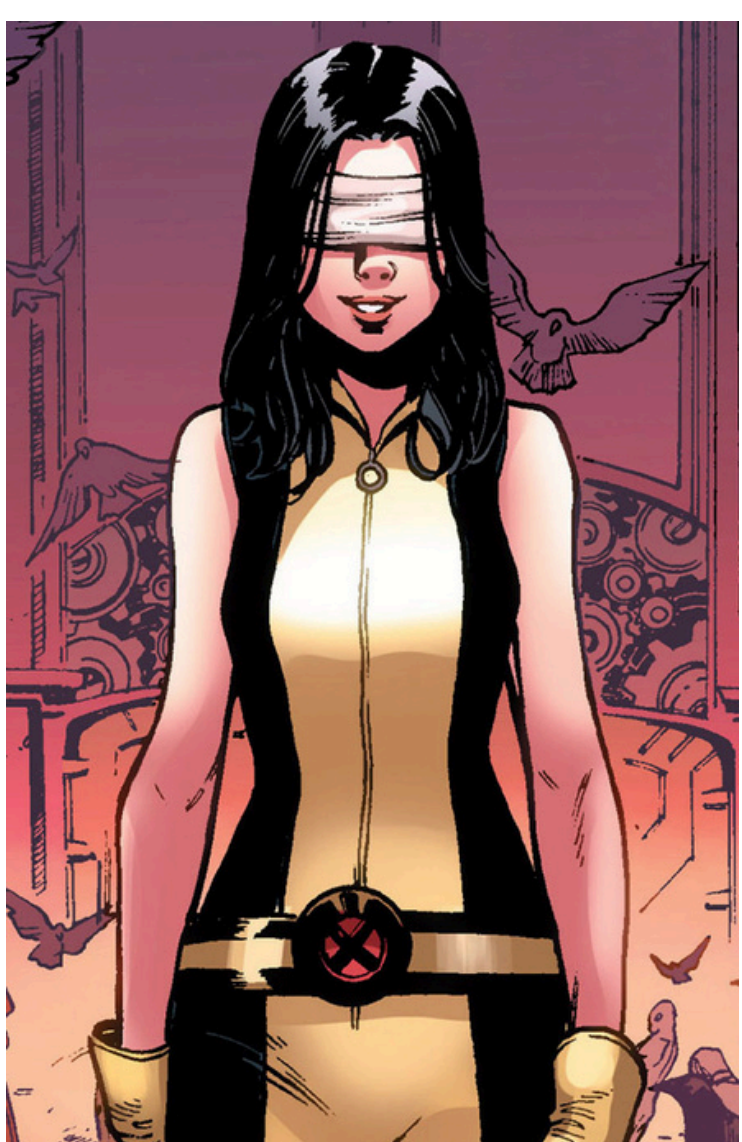
Created in 1976, the Shroud dedicates his life to fighting crime after seeing his parents murdered by criminals. Upon finishing his training with a mysterious warrior cult, he is branded on the face with their mark, which removed his vision and replaced it with mystic extrasensory perception. He appears sporadically.

MADAME WEB (MARVEL COMICS)



Blind and paralyzed, the powerful telepath and clairvoyant Cassandra Webb has appeared periodically as a supporting character in Spider-man comics and other media since 1980.

BLINDFOLD (MARVEL COMICS)



A member of the mutant superhero team the X-Men since first appearing in 2004, Blindfold is a mutant born with no eyes, who has powerful telepathic abilities.

STICK (MARVEL COMICS)



Stick first appeared in Daredevil comics in 1981, a blind sensei who trains Daredevil and other related characters over the years.

I-CHING (DC COMICS)



I-Ching first appeared in Wonder Woman in 1968, a blind martial artist who trained Wonder Woman when she lost her powers and has shown up on various occasions over the years to train other superheroes.

BLINDSHOT (AMERICA'S BEST COMICS)



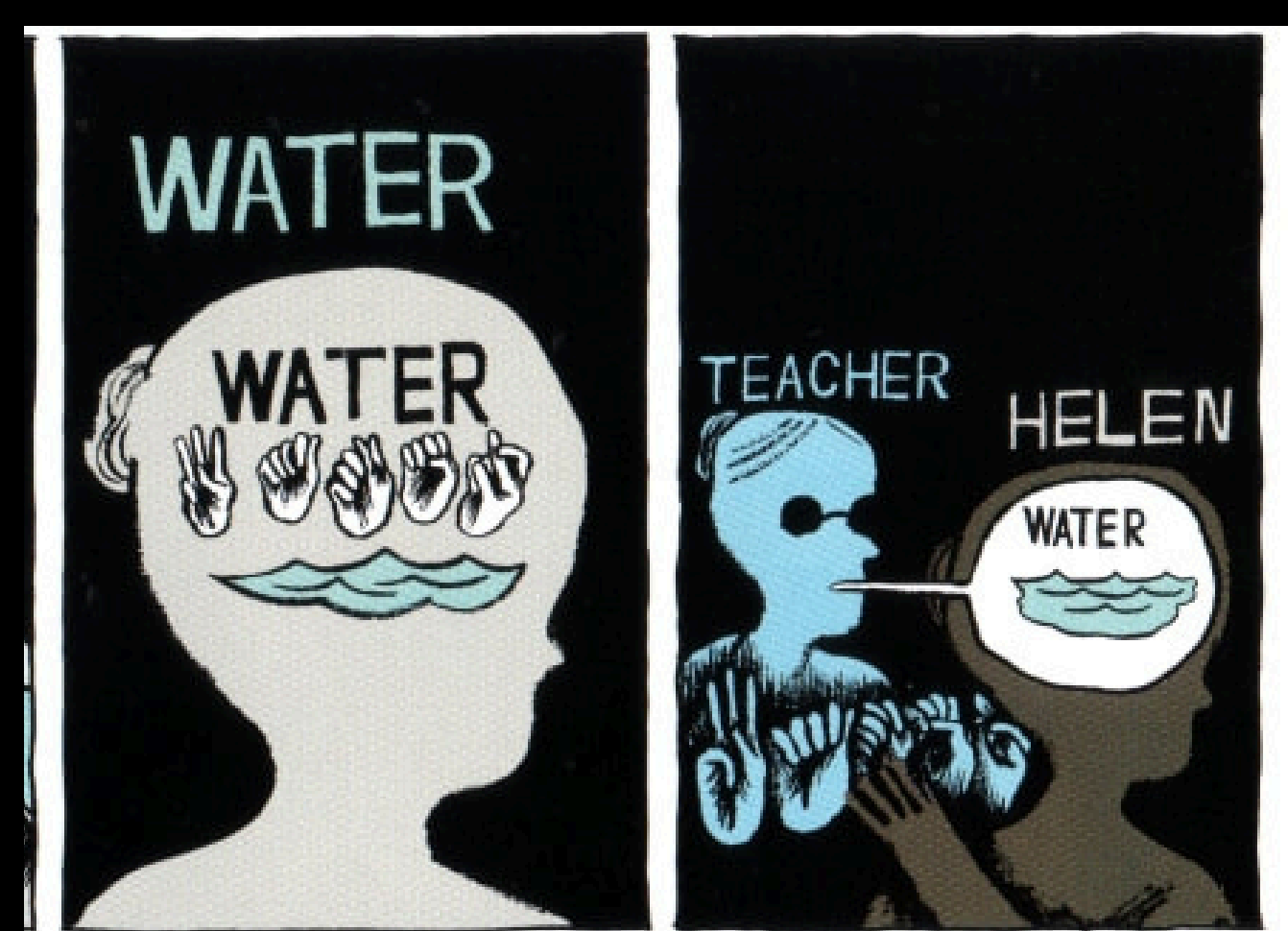
Blindshot is a blind cab driver with "Zen senses" to take passengers "where they need to be." He shows up in a few panels of the 1999 comic series Top Ten.

BLINDNESS BEYOND SUPERHERO COMICS

Annie Sullivan and the Trials of Helen Keller

by Joseph Lambert

This retelling of the early experiences of Annie Sullivan teaching Helen Keller sign language makes great use of the comics form to get at how this communication between them transpired.



My Aunt is a Monster

by Remeina Yee



Young Safia had always wanted to go on adventures, but being blind, she didn't think that would ever be possible. When she ends up living with her aunt (who happens to be a monster) – they go on a dangerous adventure together. Safia's blindness is treated simply as part of her character and never the focus.

“Everyone was talking about this guy who could climb walls and I had no idea who [Spider-man] was. I asked my dad whether he could tell me about him, and he brought home a comic book and read it to me, and it's just an amazing experience... I am over the moon, because I am understanding every single thing that's happening... And, as I get older, my friends get more and more into comic books... and I can't access them because there's no way to scan them... no way to make the pictures tactile, and so I'm kind of stuck, I'm in limbo.”

-- INVENTOR & ENTREPRENEUR MATTHEW SHIFRIN

The Impending Blindness of Billie Scott

by Zoe Thorogood

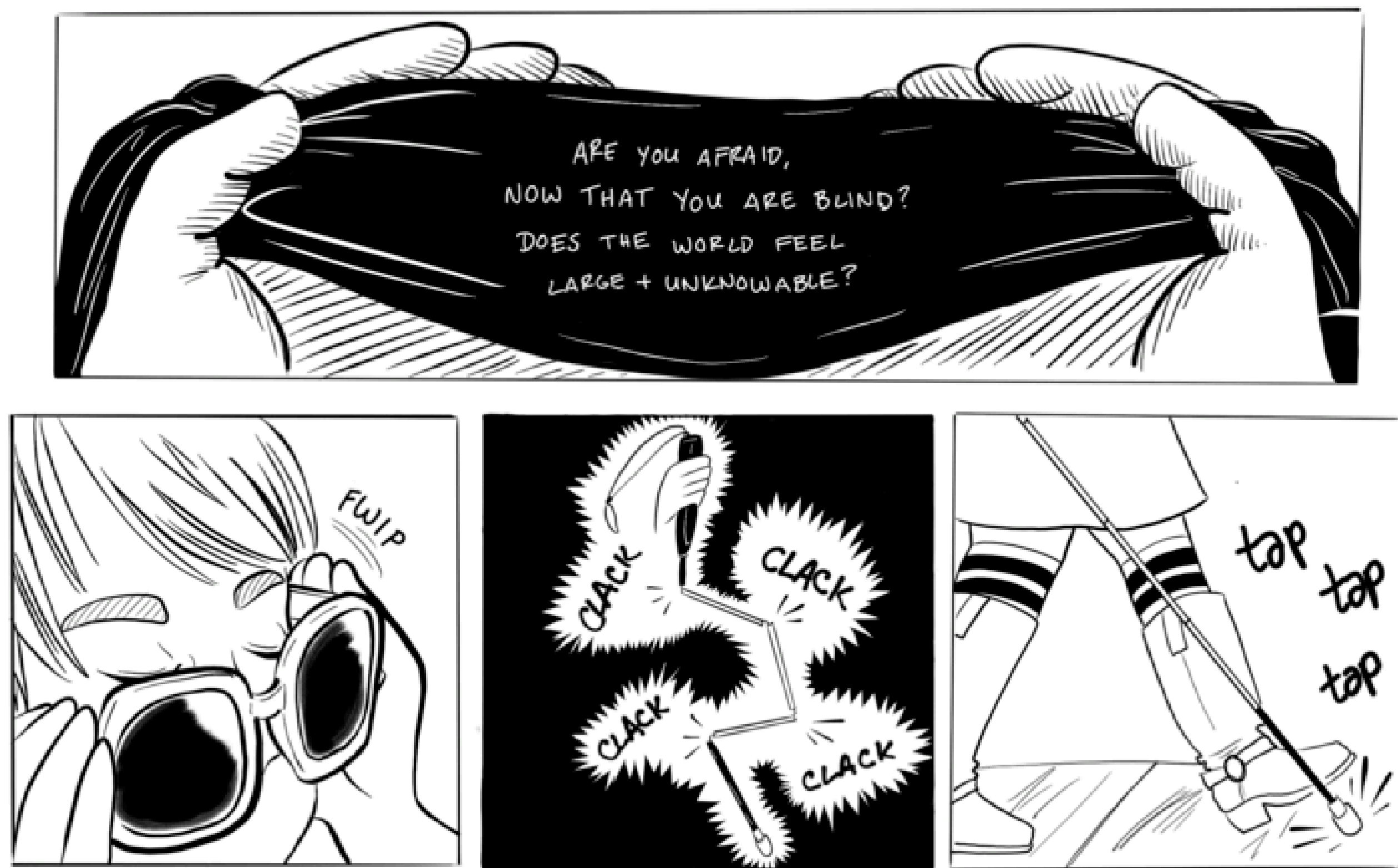
The story follows Billie Scott, a young artist who learns she is soon to lose her sight and sets out to find ten people to paint their portraits for an exhibition before she can no longer see.



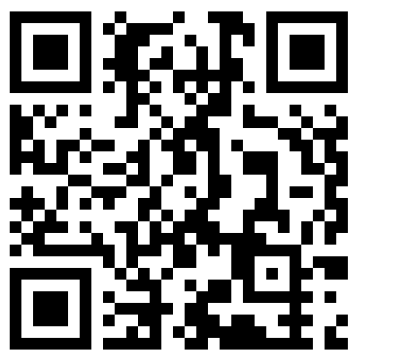
BLIND CREATORS MAKING COMICS

Representations of blindness are improving, and blind people are helping make change from on the inside. Blind people serve as script consultants to guide better representations in storylines and drawings of blindness, like how someone accurately navigates with a white cane. And there are blind comics creators now changing the conversation too, using the comics medium to best share their stories of navigating life in a vision-centric world.

M. SABINE REAR



Scan to access more of M. Sabine's work!



M. Sabine Rear describes herself as "a cartoonist and zine-maker, and the cute blind lady you gave your seat to on the bus." Her work addresses disability, embodied politics, and public space, and seeks to trouble distinctions between "high" and "low" culture. This four page comic about blindness and ableist classroom practices was read at the 2017 Comics & Medicine conference.

“ Why do I bother making a visual medium, as someone with low vision? And why do I make it about myself? So I think those things are tied together for me. I will say that I don't see myself reflected in a lot of visual media and particularly in comics I find it really empowering to bother to bring myself into that visual space and to engage with the aspects of visual media that I find interesting. We not only want to see ourselves in media...we don't want to see ourselves misrepresented so we want to be talking about who's in the room, making what choices about [how] the story gets told.

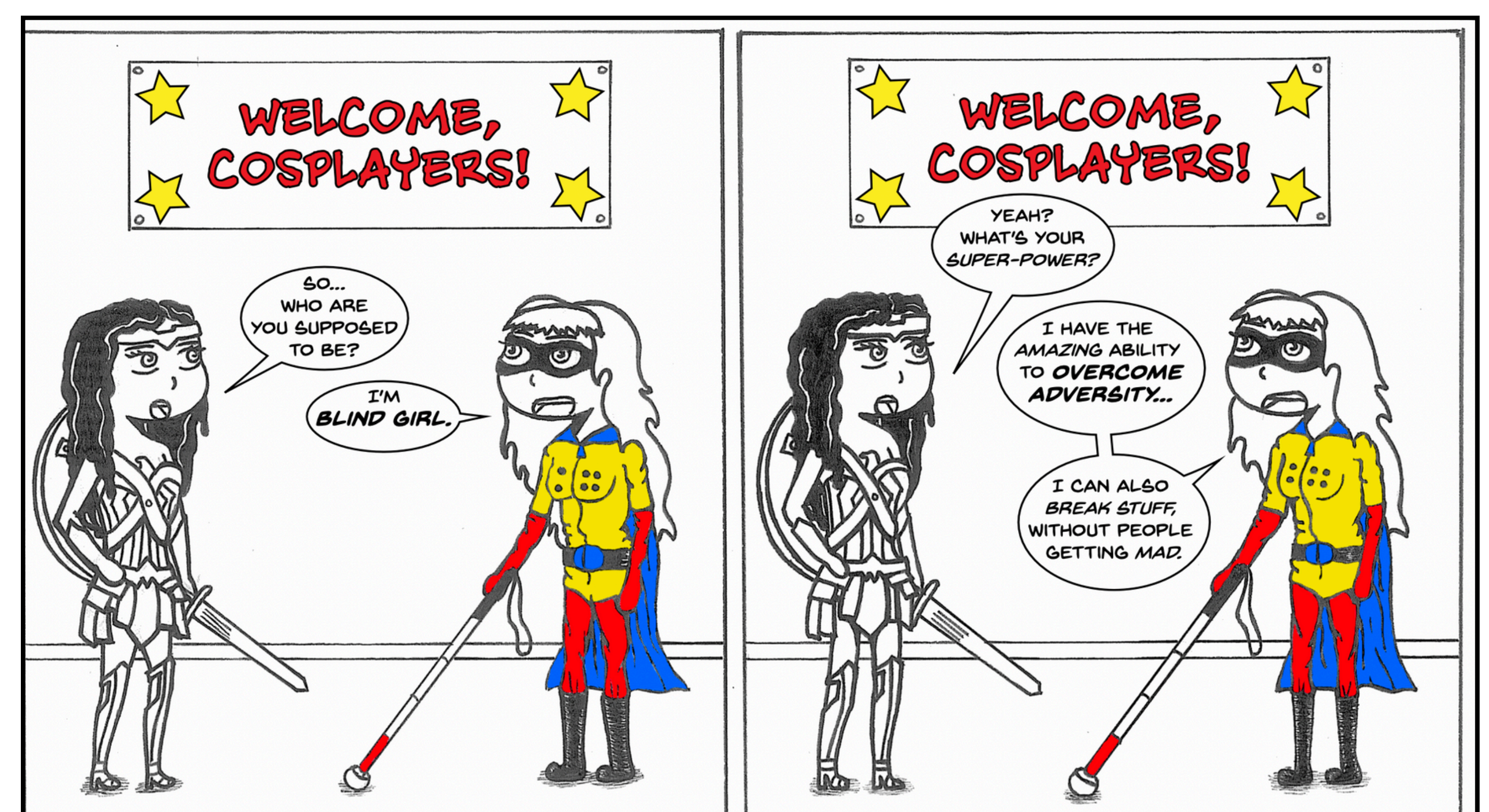
-- COMICS MAKER M. SABINE REAR

MARIEKE DAVIS

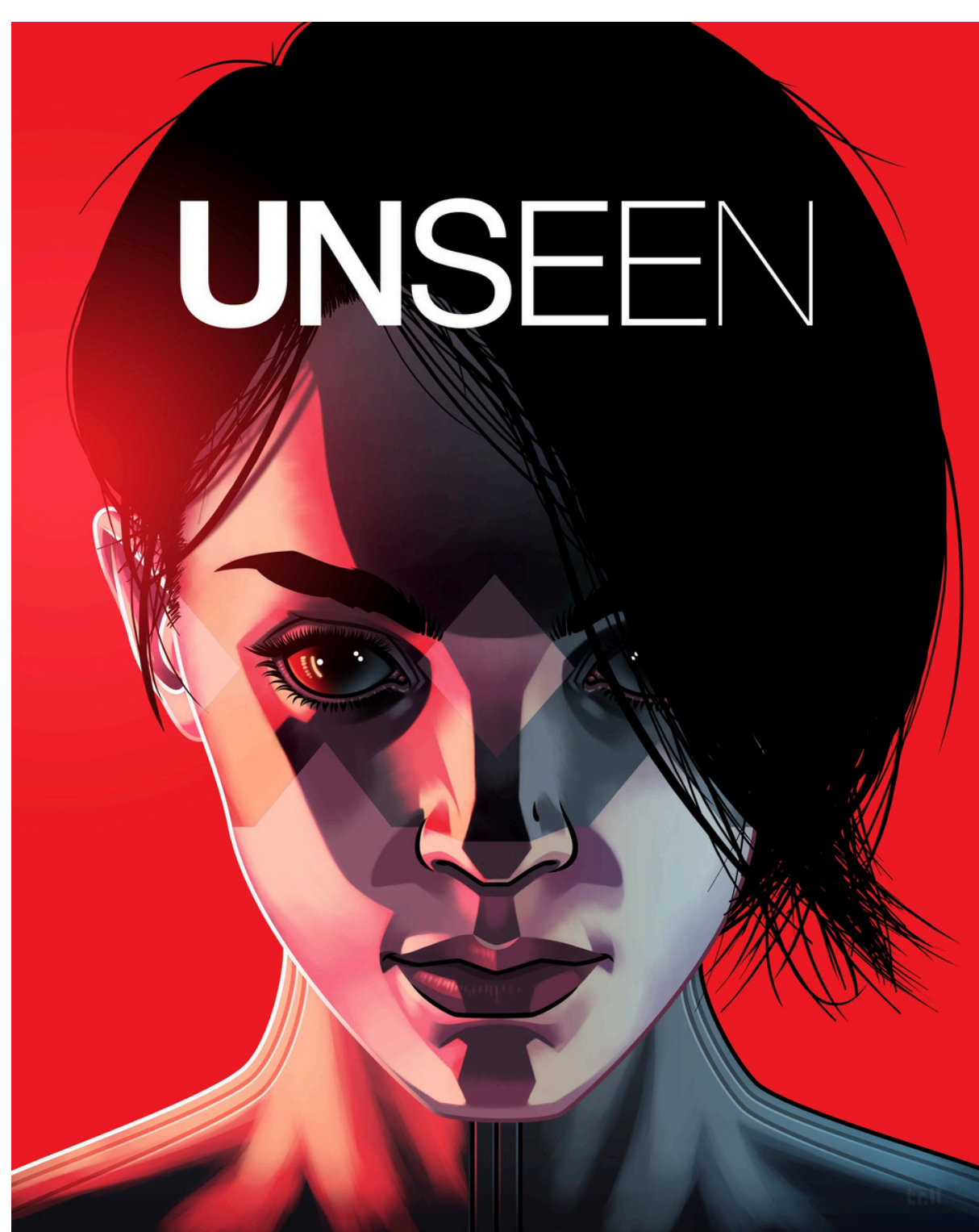
Marieke Davis is a legally blind, professional visual artist and author with right-side hemi-anopsia--missing right-side peripheral vision in both eyes, as a result of three brain surgeries to remove recurrent tumors since she was ten. While still an undergraduate, she began her graphic series, "Ember Black," in print and audio formats, as well as a semi-autobiographical comic, "Life is Blurry," an ironic view of the world from the perspective of a visually impaired visual artist, and won a VSA Emerging Young Artist Award from the Kennedy Center.

Check out the table for two editions of **Ember Black!**

Scan to access more of Marieke's work!

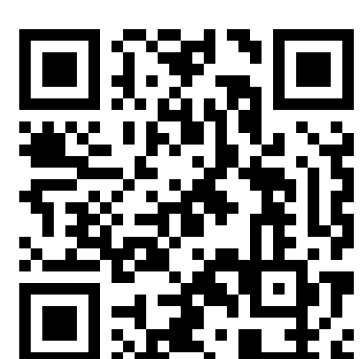


UNSEEN BY CHAD ALLEN



Unseen is a comics-inspired narrative created by **Chad Allen** and featuring the story of a blind assassin and heroine named Afsana. Written by a blind person, this comic has no visual form, made to be accessible and prioritize the blind listener's experience, though sighted people are invited to check out Afsana's journey too.

Scan to access more of Chad's work!



“ The comic medium offers some unique superpowers we should all get to experience!... Access to comics means access to education, to culture, to the intensity and power of sequential storytelling, and to a more creative, engaged and joyful way of spatial cognition and expression.

-- ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR, NY PUBLIC LIBRARY, CHANCEY FLEET



HEARING COMICS: AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Audio adaptations offer the most developed and affordable form of access for comics to date. Some versions are more like radio dramas, which lean on sound and strong voice acting but drop the attention to the visuals. Others provide detailed or poetic language to translate comics visuals into words. While many comics start as written scripts, other comics are formed with words and pictures so closely intertwined that translating into language requires a lot of tough choices - an artistic process in and of itself!

FANTASTIC FOUR #9

In this 2023 issue of **The Fantastic Four**, comics writer **Ryan North** and artist **Ivan Fiorelli** draw attention to comics' inaccessible form and show the primary means of access for blind comics enthusiasts today: oral reading and improvised description from a loved one. As the script demonstrates, comics often begin with words and visual description even though it is not intended for blind access.

Check out the table for the issue and script!



Ryan North's script to **Fantastic Four** Issue 9, May 12th 2022

[North's note to artist Ivan Fiorelli] We get to be a little more formalist in this one, since it's Alicia's turn to narrate! I did a bunch of research on how blind people read comics for this, because it felt wrong to have Alicia narrate a medium she can't see without addressing that in some way. And it turned out super interesting, so now we get to have a big battle while also having a bit of fun with the nature of art and the medium we all love! Hope you like it. :)

Doom is still tangled up in Reed Richards, but now he's hanging from a streetlight outside a police station, classic Spider-Man style. Reed has wrapped his body around the pole to be the net, holding him there. The other members of the FF are standing at the base of the telephone pole, shaking hands with the impressed police officers.

ALICIA NARRATION: Ben reads me my comics - he understands what I like to know about, and I can always ask him for more detail whenever I want.

DOOM: **I HAVE DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY, YOU FOOLS!!!**

REED: YOU CAN SCREAM ALL ABOUT IT ALL YOU WANT, DOOM...

REED: ...ON YOUR POGO-PLANE FLIGHT BACK TO **LATVERIA!**

Back to reality, with our normal style. We see Ben and Alicia, at home (in NYC, before the farmhouse), reading a FANTASTIC FOUR comic with Doom and Reed comic on the cover. Ben and Alicia are on a couch - Ben's sitting and reading, Alicia's stretched out on her back beside him, using his leg as a pillow. The mood is pleasant, comfortable, relaxed. Alicia's got her eyes closed, a slight smile on her face.

BEN: An' Doom's all tangled up in Reed an' he's yellin' "I have **diplomatic immunity, you fools!**"

ALICIA: Heh.

ALICIA NARRATION: Or at least, he used to read me my comics.

UNFLATTENING

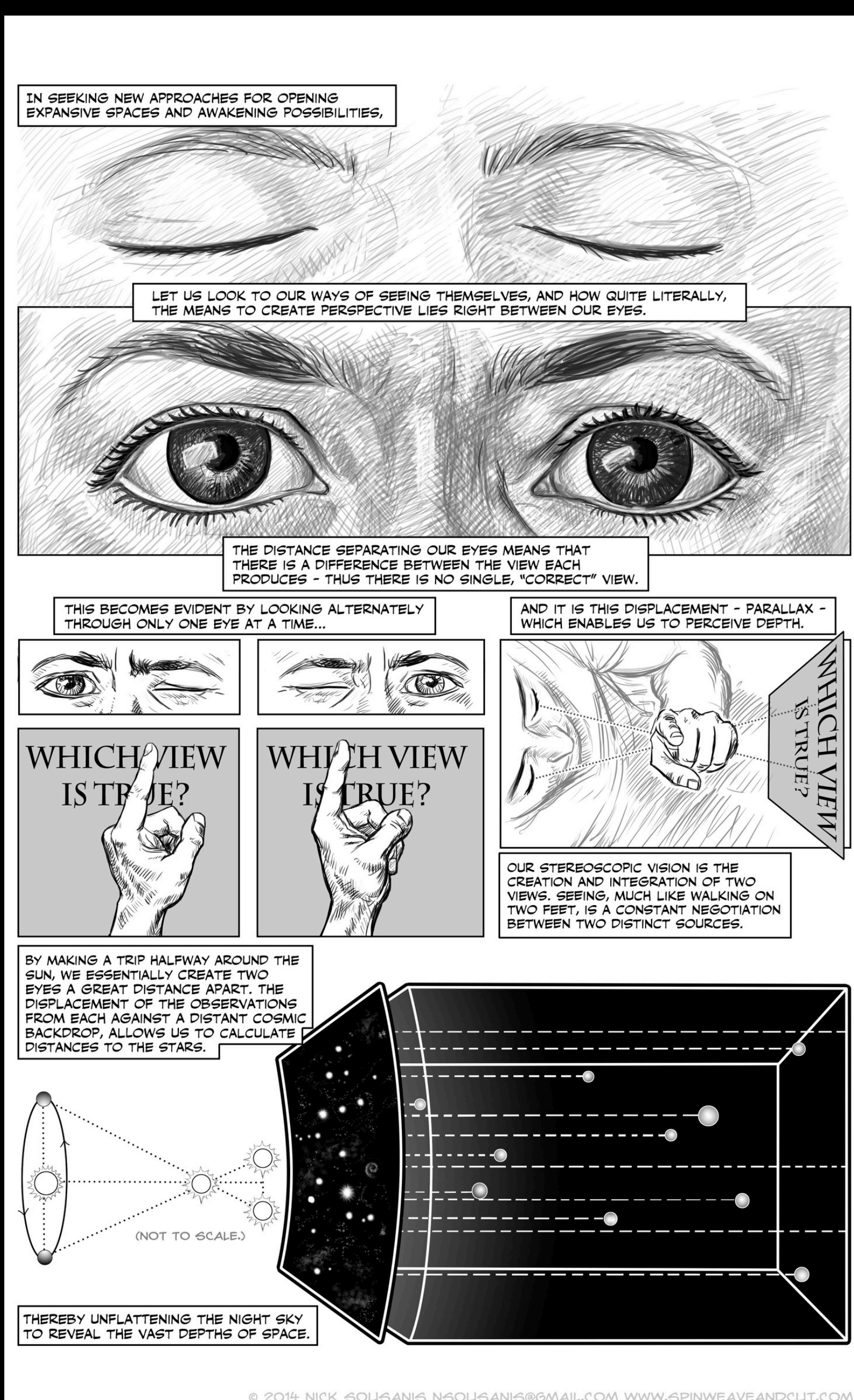
Even the most visually complex work can tackle innovative forms of access, but it takes finesse, and there is no consensus inside of the blind community about the best way to put comics into words.

What visuals can be rendered through words, and what can get lost in the translation? To engage the blind listener, how far from the original art form can description stray while still honoring the artist's work?

To explore the possibilities, we created three different styles to describe the visually complex work of Nick Sousanis' comic **Unflattening** - one developed by IDC Digital to offer a professional describer's approach, another written by Sousanis with commentary that only the author could provide, and a third style, written by Emily Beitiks as narrative prose, breaking free from direct translation to provide the meaning of Sousanis' work in an entertaining way.

Check out the table to see the three description approaches for Nick Sousanis' Unflattening, and ask what opportunities and challenges each style provides.

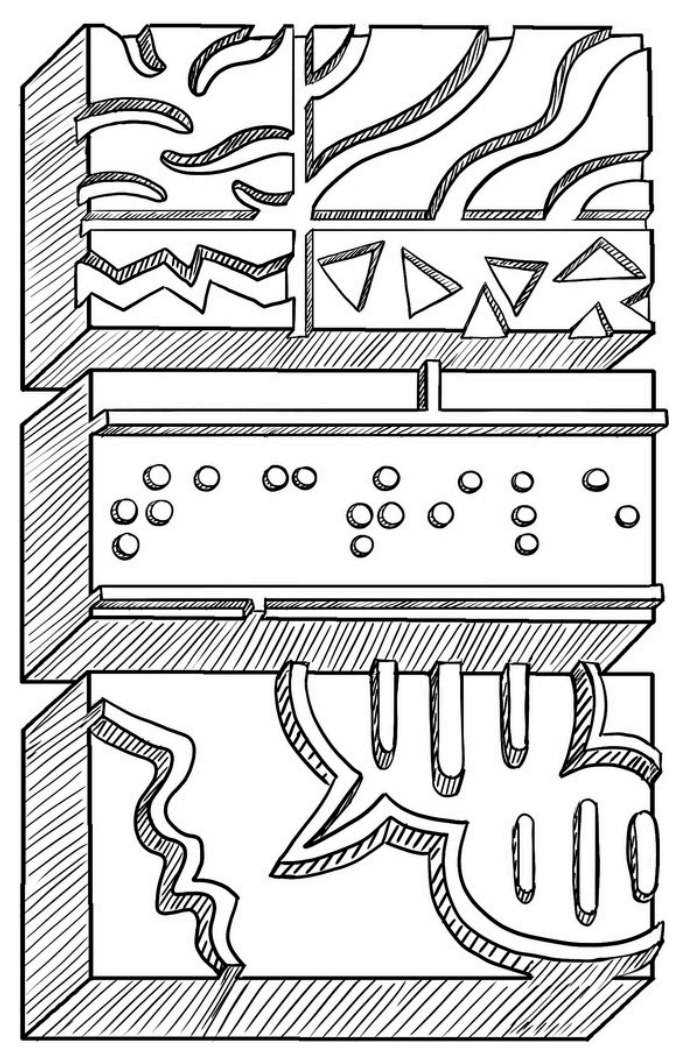
We shared all three descriptions with a blind expert panel for feedback - scan to access it!



Scan to access the panel and check out the recorded descriptions!



“ When it comes to audio description, what you add is just as important as what you leave out. You want description that is equal to people who can see the work as much as people who cannot. So to me, I think the best method is to describe the things that are moving the story forward. -- COMICS ARTIST AND AUTHOR MARIEKE DAVIS ”

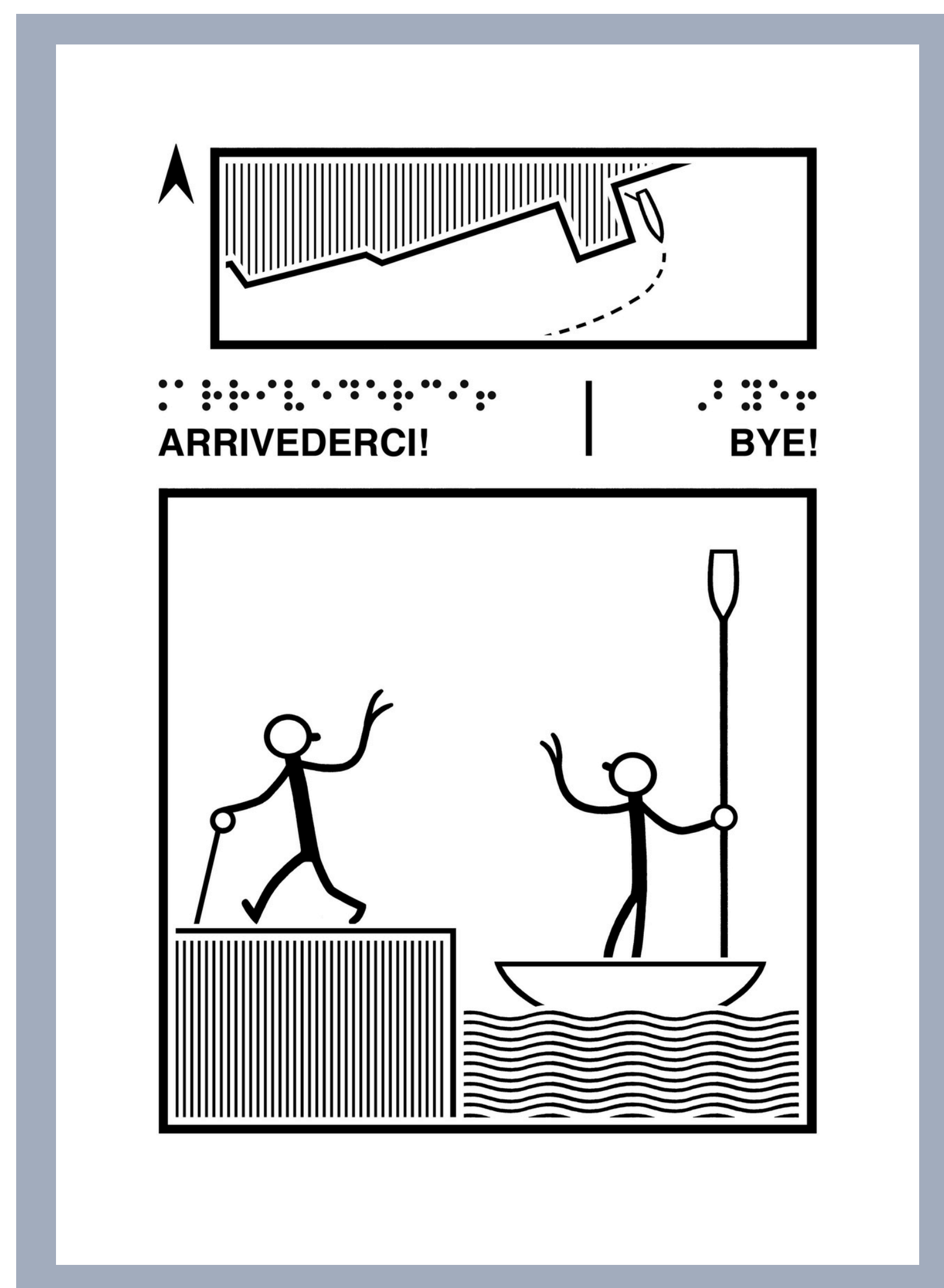
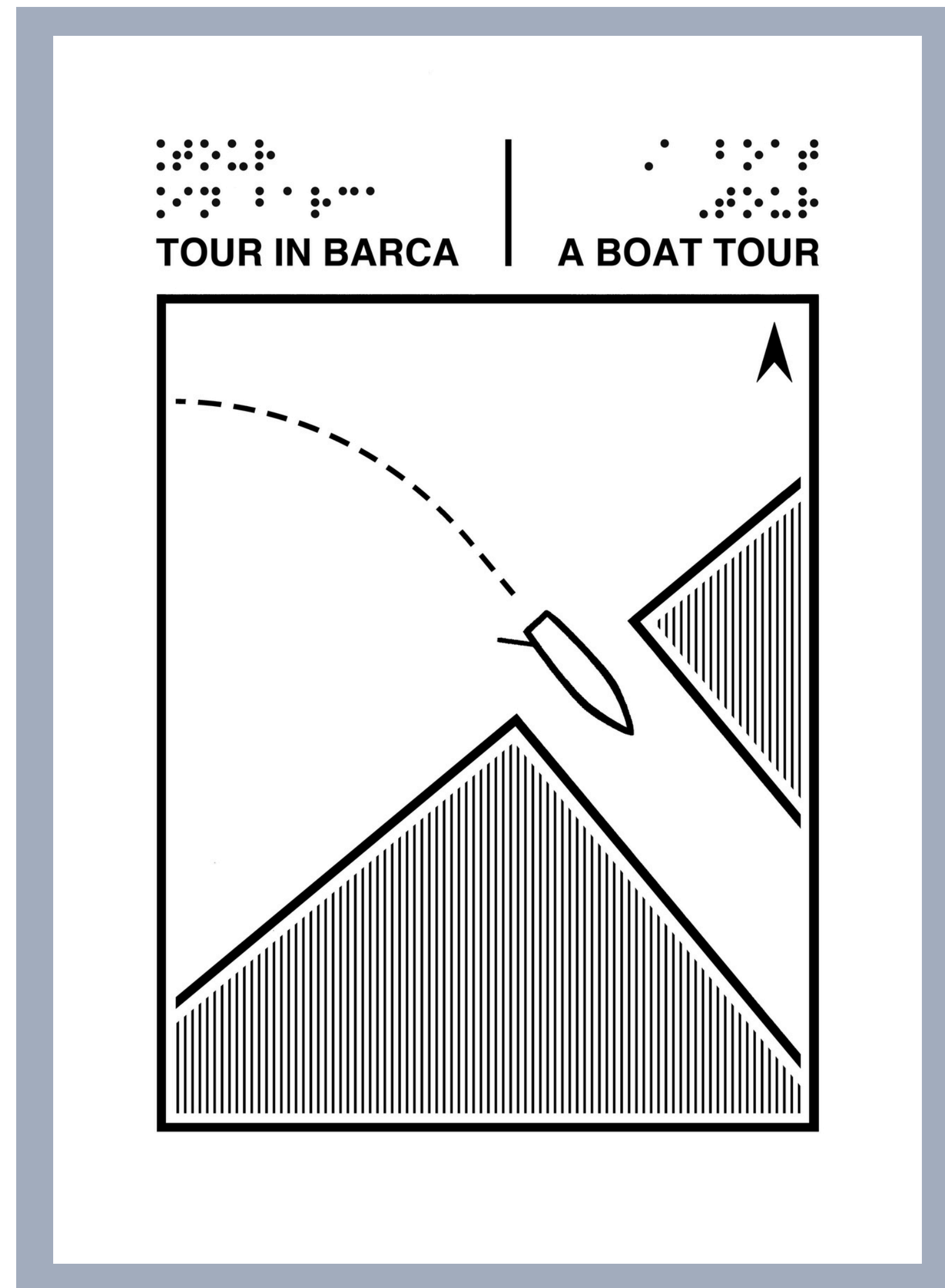
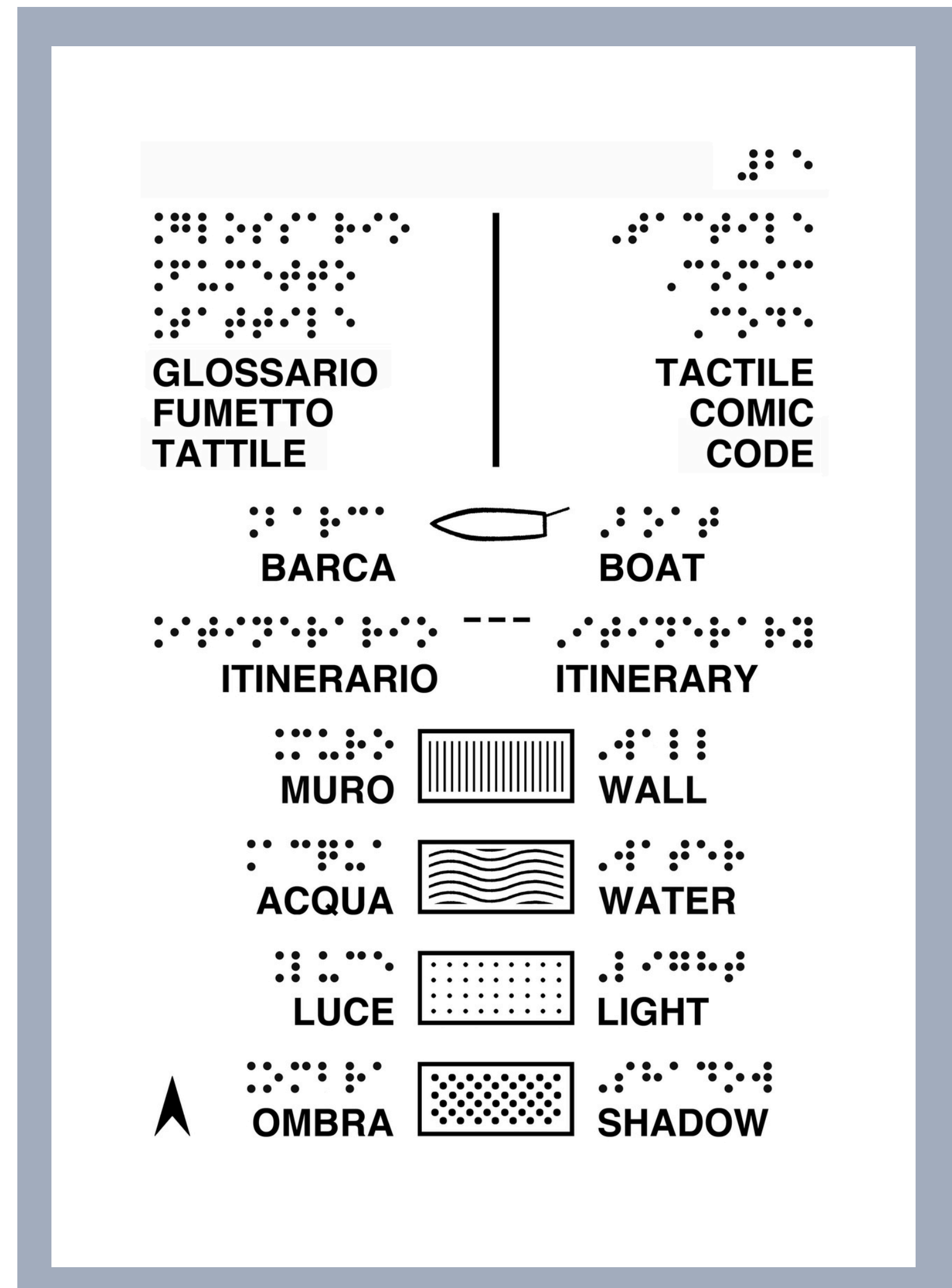


TOUCHING COMICS: TACTILE GRAPHICS

Tactile comics can convey the play and collisions between words and pictures across the page. But how many details can be felt before it all becomes too confusing? Touch these comics - what details make sense to you?

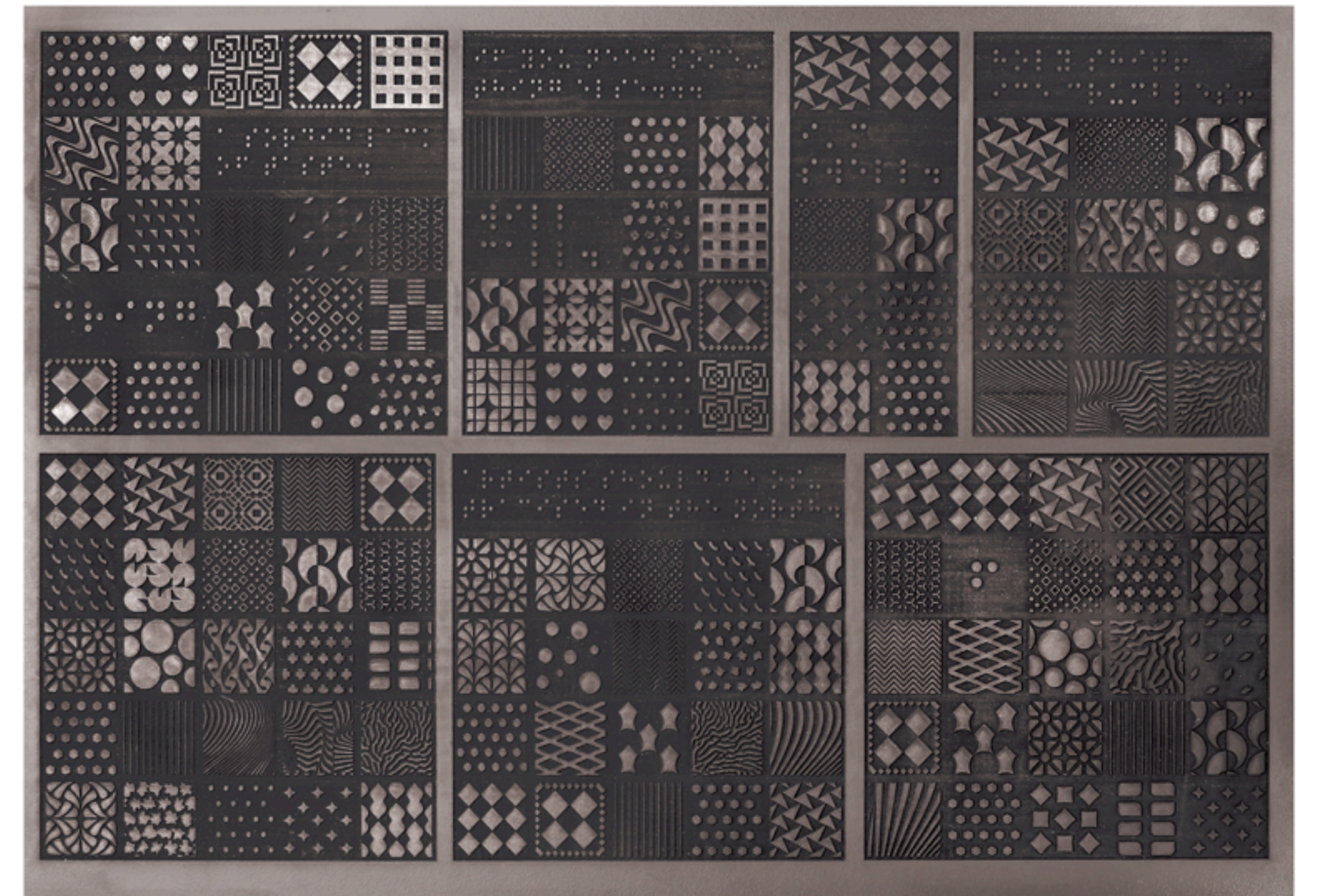
MAX'S "A BOAT TOUR" (2017)

Max (a.k.a. Francesc Capdevila Gisbert) created this tactile comic, "A Boat Tour" to participate in Catalan's contribution to the Venice Biennial. With braille and raised textures, he tells a simple story that introduces the reader to urban architecture and the sensory tourism of a Venetian boat ride, from the unexpected moments of silence on the water to the narrow squeeze between buildings. Check it out!



SHAPEREADER

Conceptual comic artist Ilan Manouach created Shapereader, which offers an entire vocabulary of different abstract geometric shapes on laminated metal plates. Some shapes refer to characters, others to actions, and some are narrative props. Exploring Shapereader means that the reader gets acquainted with this whole set of symbols first, and then reads them as a story. The experience puts both the sighted and blind reader on equal footing, as they both are encountering this alien yet familiar code for the first time.

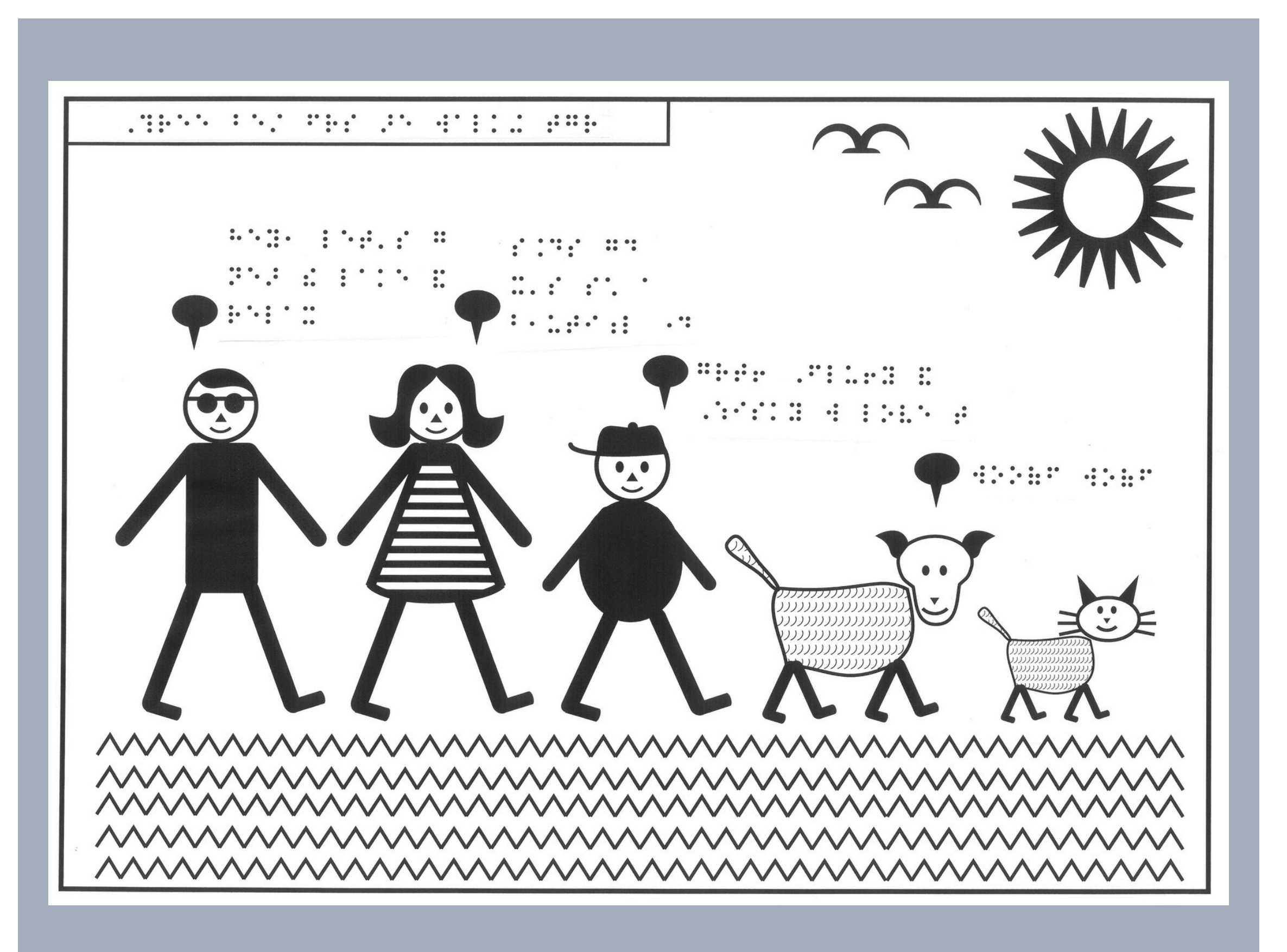
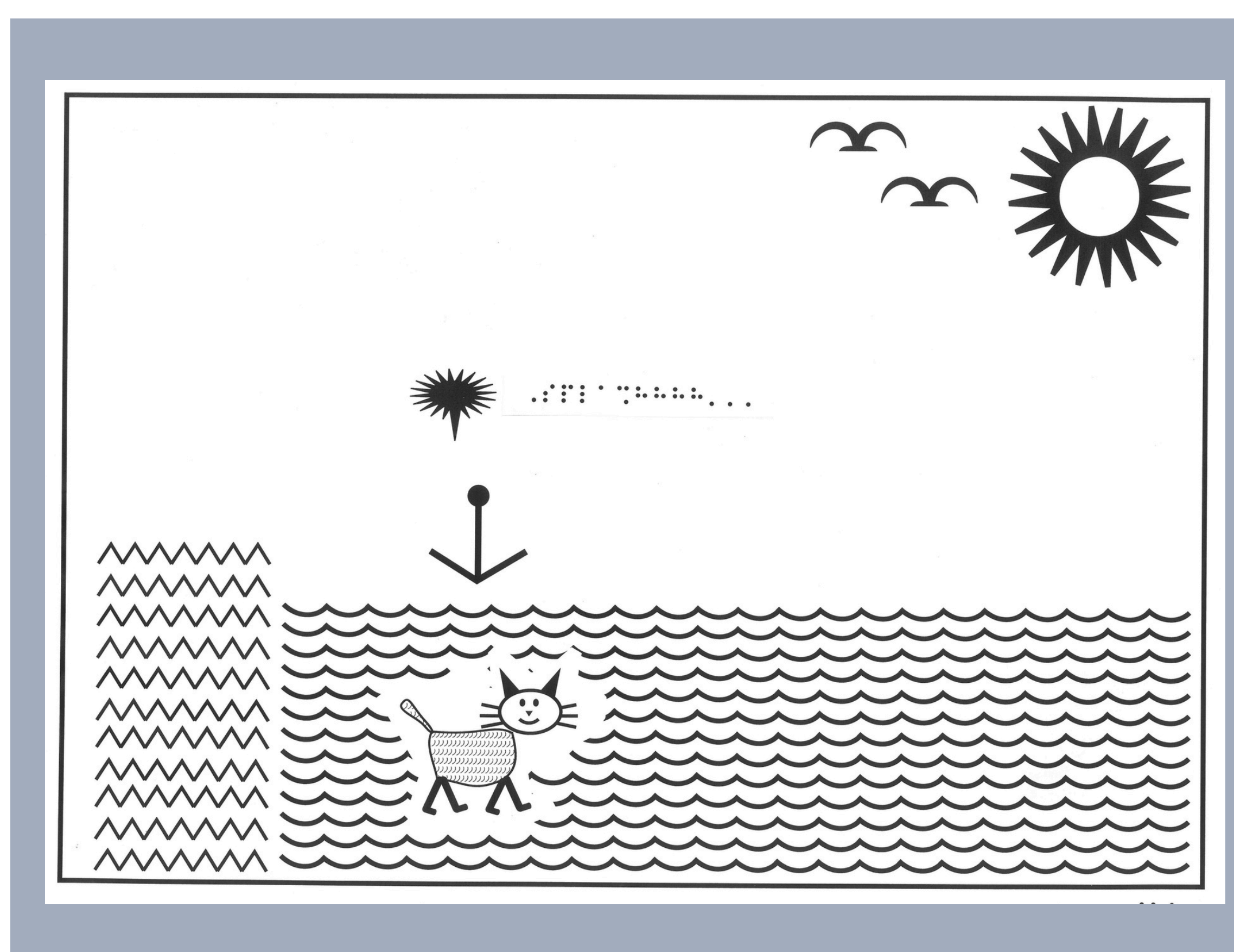


“ While I would like to dislodge the notion that blind people rely exclusively on touch perception to know the world, I admit that whenever I have the opportunity to get my hands on art, I leap at the chance.

-- GEORGINA KLEEGER, AUTHOR OF MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE: WHAT BLINDNESS BRINGS TO ART, PG. 60

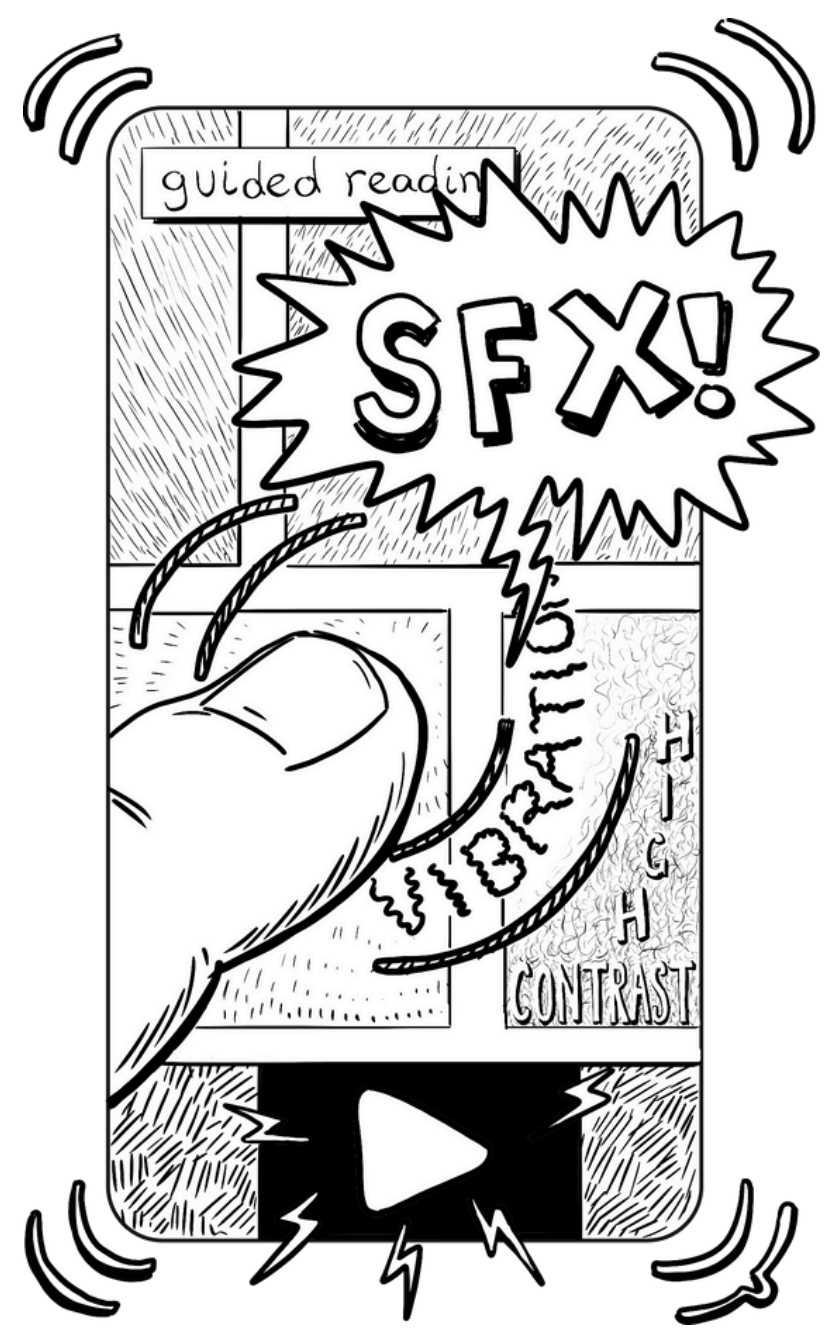
MICHAEL SUTJIADI "THE ADVENTURE OF JARRETT AND FRIENDS"

Michael Sutjiadi created "The Adventure of Jarrett and Friends" as his Masters project to train young deaf-blind readers on how to navigate comics. It begins with tactile and braille instructions to orient the reader to the comics form, then lays out a story. To make the tactile graphics usable required each comics panel to take up a whole page. Check it out (and feel it!) on the table.



REINVENTING COMICS: HAPTICS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

As comics and multimedia creators think about accessibility for blind consumers, a range of modalities might be considered when rendering comics for nonvisual consumption. With new and emerging technological advancements, one potential gain is to give the blind user more navigation control over how they explore a comic.

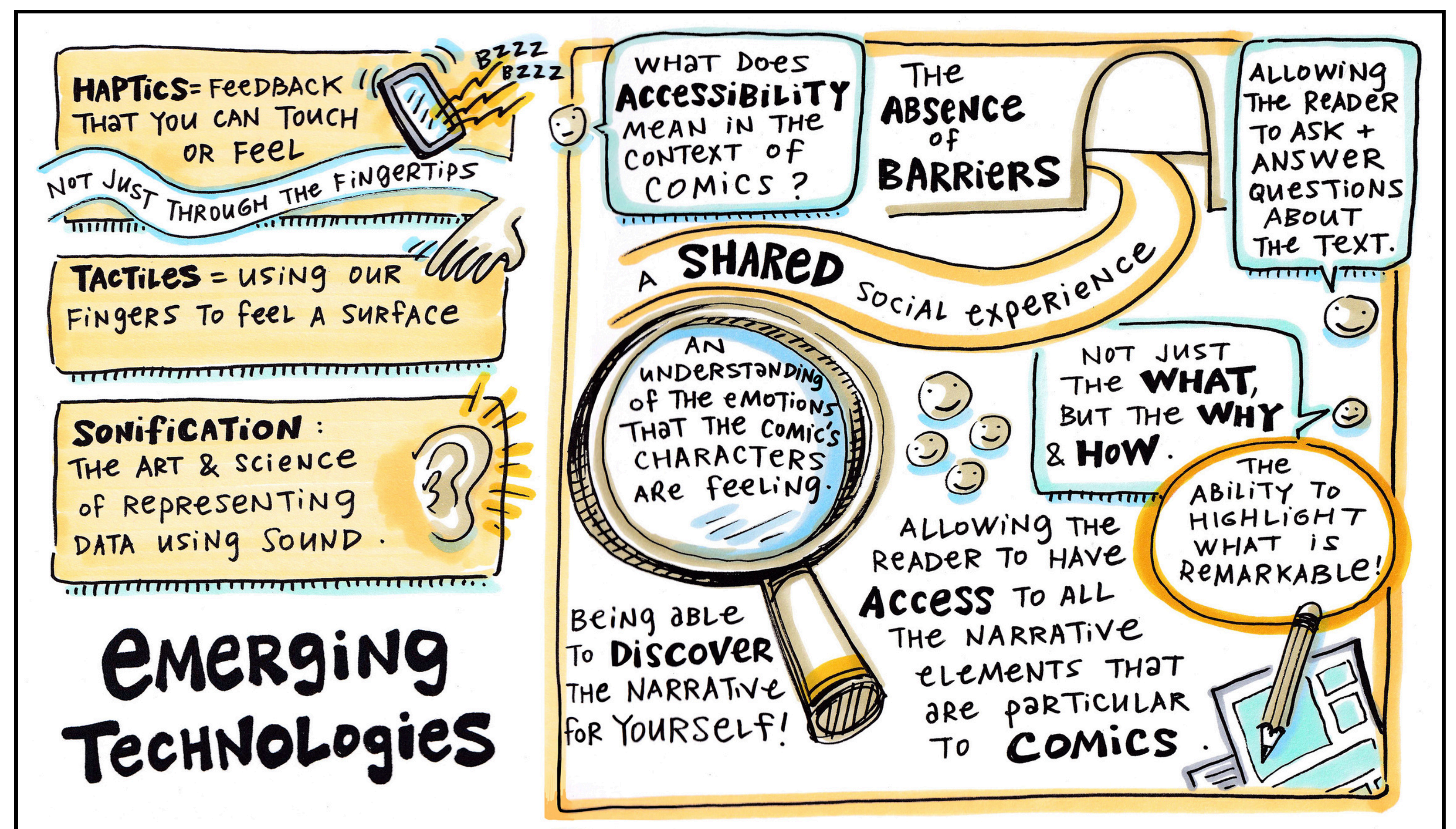


"PROJECT DAREDEVIL"



"Project Daredevil," a project by **Matthew Shiffrin, Tina Quach, and Dan Levine** with MIT immersive virtual reality, proposed the creation of a helmet to make a wearer feel like the superhero while listening to a 3D sound audio comic.

SKETCHNOTE "EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES"



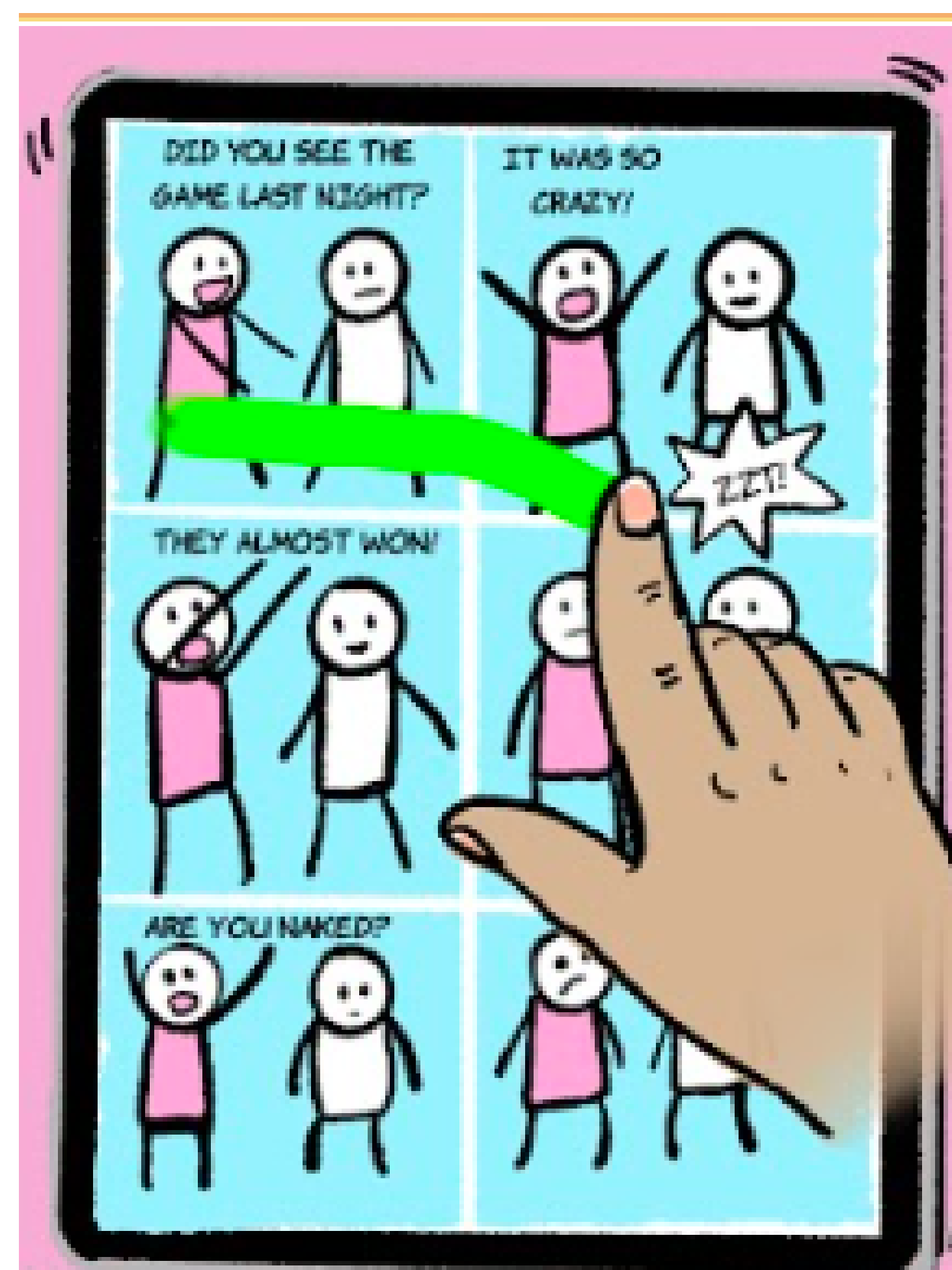
This sketchnote was developed live by **Sam Hester** during a panel on making comics accessible through emerging technologies by the Accessible Comics Collective on August 12, 2021.

THE MONARCH AND TACTILE GRAPHIC DISPLAYS



New innovations like HumanWare's **The Monarch**, a tactile Braille device, might allow tactile comics to grow. Roughly the size of a small laptop with a 10-line by 32-cell refreshable Braille display, pins raise to create the tactile representations, and then with the click of the button, they transform into the next tactile picture.

VIZLING



Darren DeFrain and Aaron Rodriguez's Vizling app makes comics accessible through an interface that mixes haptics with voiced description, allowing users to explore and navigate the comic page by touch. They were one of the prizewinners of the **ACC Design Competition**, which brought the app creators together with low vision comics creator **Marieke Davis** and blind experts who have helped guide Vizling's development. Learn more and test it out!



VIZLING TESTIMONIAL

" I felt like I was reading a comic again! When I was a kid in Brazil there was a comic called Mauricio Da Souza that I loved and I felt that experience again. I felt like I was immersed in the story.

-- CO-OWNER OF ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES SILVANA RAINEY

"

THE ACC DESIGN COMPETITION



The Accessible Comics Collective (ACC) brings together comic makers, access professionals, and blind comics fans for dialogue and generative collaboration to fuel the development of this nascent field. Since 2021, we have hosted four convenings, reaching hundreds of participants across the globe eager to see this field blossom. Each event has prioritized centering the expertise of blind people in our programming.

The ACC launched a competition in the summer of 2022 to motivate new innovations in access, inviting proposals from teams (each had at least one blind member) to either adapt a traditional comic into an accessible version or produce a new comic "born accessible." Then, they received feedback during a public panel from blind experts to support their designs.

SEEING INBETWEEN

BY ILLI ANNA HEGER AND RAE LANZEROTTI

Eavesdrop on two nonbinary queer people chatting about spaces in between and navigating accessibility. This queer comic conversation, a collaboration between Rae Lanzerotti and Illi Anna Heger, is about seeing and being seen in between abilities, genders, and spaces. This comic is accessible in different ways: play audio or read text transcripts, and view visual images or get descriptions. Choose the complete audio version, the full text version, or click through the multimodal elements of audio, text, visuals, and embedded alt text.

Seeing InBetween

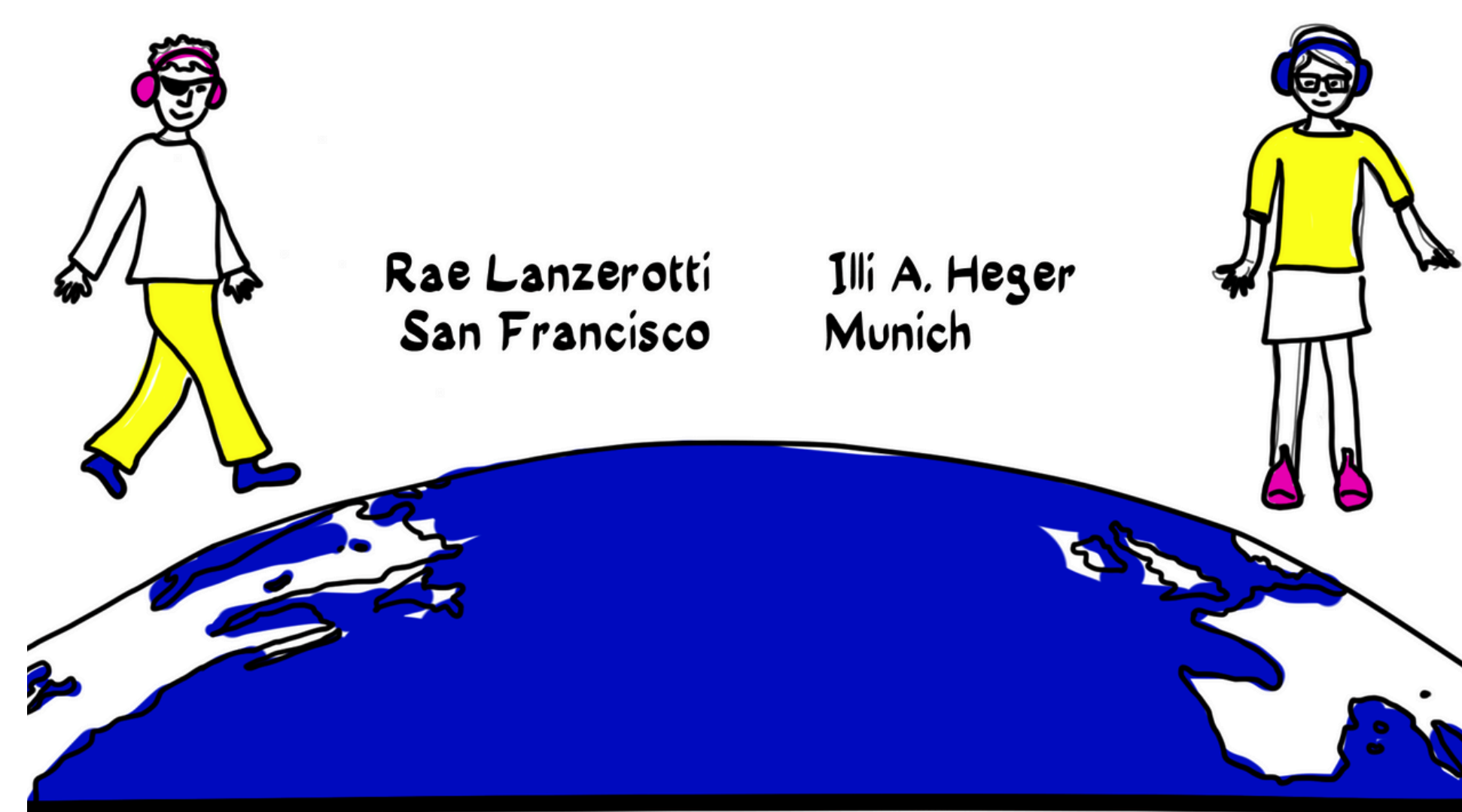


Image Description 1: The title at the top of the comic panel reads: Seeing Inbetween. Two people are hovering over the arc of the blue earth, with Europe and the USA in focus. Their names and cities are written next to them. The comic has black line art-line-art with pink, yellow, and blue coloring and gray tones. On the left, Rae Lanzerotti, from San Francisco, wears an eyepatch, pink headphones, a white shirt, yellow pants and blue shoes. On the right, Illi A. Heger, from Munich, wears glasses, blue headphones, a yellow shirt, white skirt and pink boots and looks over at Rae.

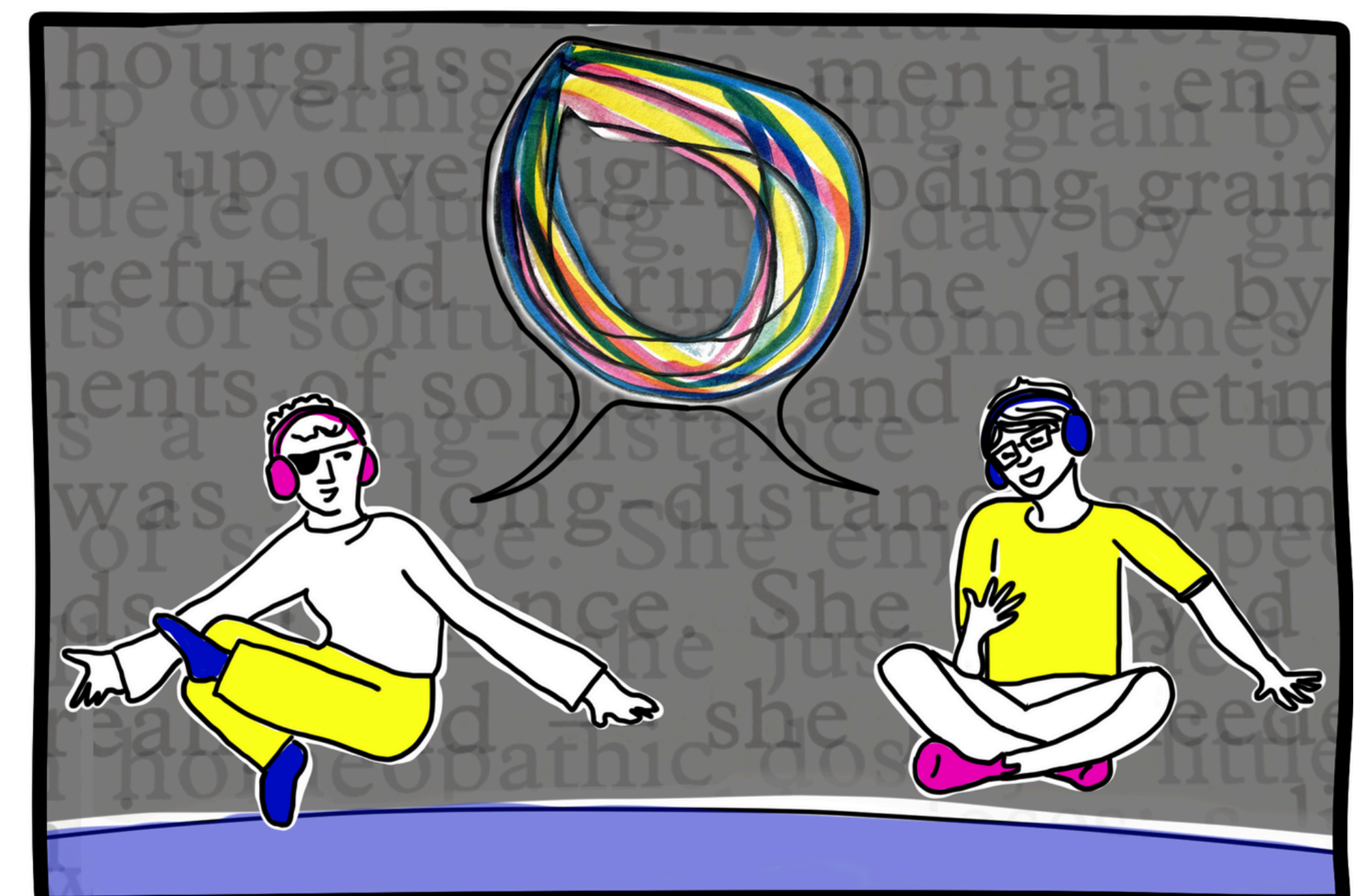
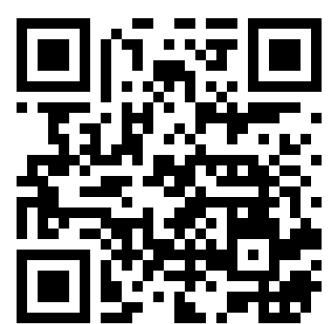


Image 2 Description: Rae and Illi sit cross-legged above the earth, gesturing broadly as they speak. The darkening sky behind them fills with overlapping words. As the words fade into the background, they read: long-distance, she, refueled, up, hourglass, and other fragments. In between Illi and Rae, their conversation forms a swirling circle of blue, yellow and pink lines.

Scan to access the full comic!



PUNK'S UNDEAD

CASEY JAMES O'CEALLAIGH AND BRIAN RUTHERFORD

Casey James O'Ceallaigh and Brian Rutherford collaborated to develop high-quality audio description to accompany Casey's comic, Punk's Undead.

Scan to listen to the audio!



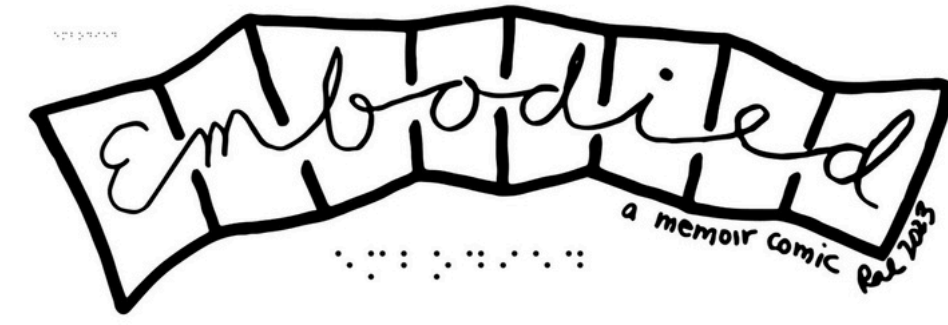
After starting this project, **Brian Rutherford** unfortunately passed away in February of 2024. On the table is Casey's eulogy to Brian, which speaks to the unexpected joys that come from thinking about access as a creative process.

“ There is a lot of room to grow... the only way for us to find out [how] is to keep making descriptions and keep getting feedback from community as much as possible. -- DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY COORDINATOR WALEI SABRY ”



EMBODIED BY RAE LANZEROTTI

Embodied presents Rae's personal story of vision loss and adaptation during the early COVID pandemic. The touchable zine is an accordion book with tactile lines, Braille words, and unfolding interior text. Follow the QR code to the Embodied web page with mix-and-match media like audio narration, screen readable text, and tactile-ready contrast images for download. Also on Instagram, @RaeRotti published Embodied as a series of posts with image descriptions and alt text. Embodied is Rae's first memoir comic to experiment with access tools and innovating accessibility, as a prototype that informs their multi-sensory comics and art assemblages. Check it out (and feel it!).



Scan to access more of their work!



THE LAND OF UNCERTAINTY BY HATIYE GARIP

The Land of Uncertainty is a poetic and accessible comic book by Turkish artist Hatiye Garip. A beautifully illustrated poem about nature, the unvisited lands, and life's unexpected twists and turns, the story unfolds through a series of abstract images in this unique comic book. In a first for Good Comics, the book makes use of tactile printing, with its images providing a sensory experience that brings the poetry and imagery of the book to life for blind and low-vision readers. **Check it out (and feel it!) on the table!**



Scan to access this comic!



VIZLING BY DARREN DEFRAIN AND AARON RODRIGUEZ

Vizling, featured in the "Emerging Technology" poster, was also a prizewinner, which brought the app creators together with low vision comics creator **Marieke Davis** and blind experts who have helped guide Vizling's development.

Scan to access this app!



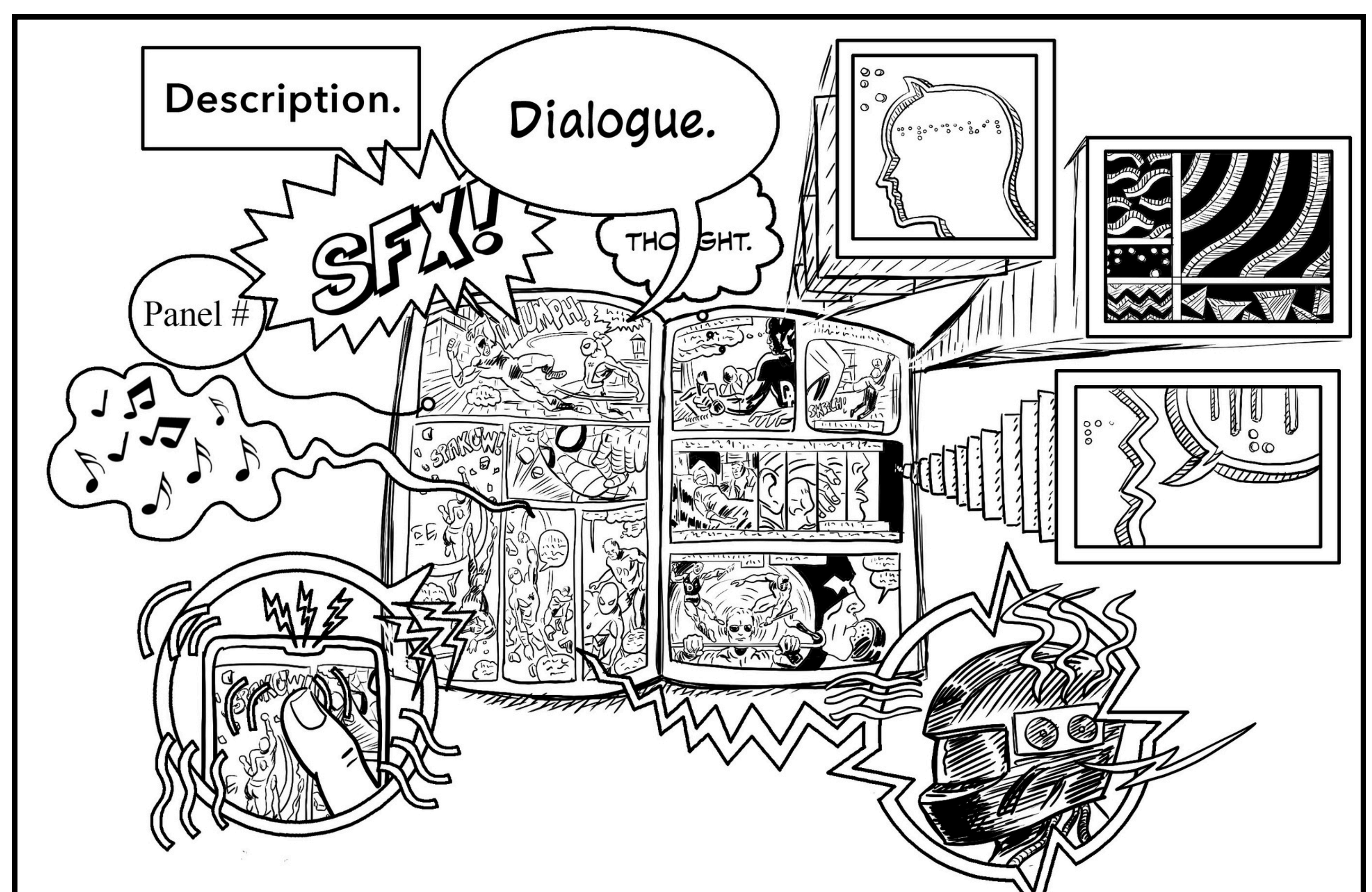
“

When I talk about accessibility, what I'm really talking about is creating a way for people with disabilities to participate equitably and with a very similar experience to the way the non-disabled participant would. That includes the factor of how much time it takes, how you get at it, how you approach it, what impact it has on you emotionally and physically. So that's an accessible experience. But it's also possible to create alternative experiences that try to sort of convey the same information but are quite different from what the experience of the primary material might be.

-- JOSHUA MIELE, PRINCIPLE ACCESSIBILITY RESEARCHER, AMAZON

”

Making this visual medium accessible will mean inventing new multimodal forms. This ongoing project aims to bring together comics makers and blind experts to forge innovative pathways to make this very difficult challenge feel possible and lead the way forward!



WHAT NEW MULTIMODAL FORMS MIGHT EMERGE?

NOW YOU TRY...

Pick one of the comics samples below and consider: how might you go about making it accessible? Write up your idea or some sample descriptive text and share it on the board!

MARCH



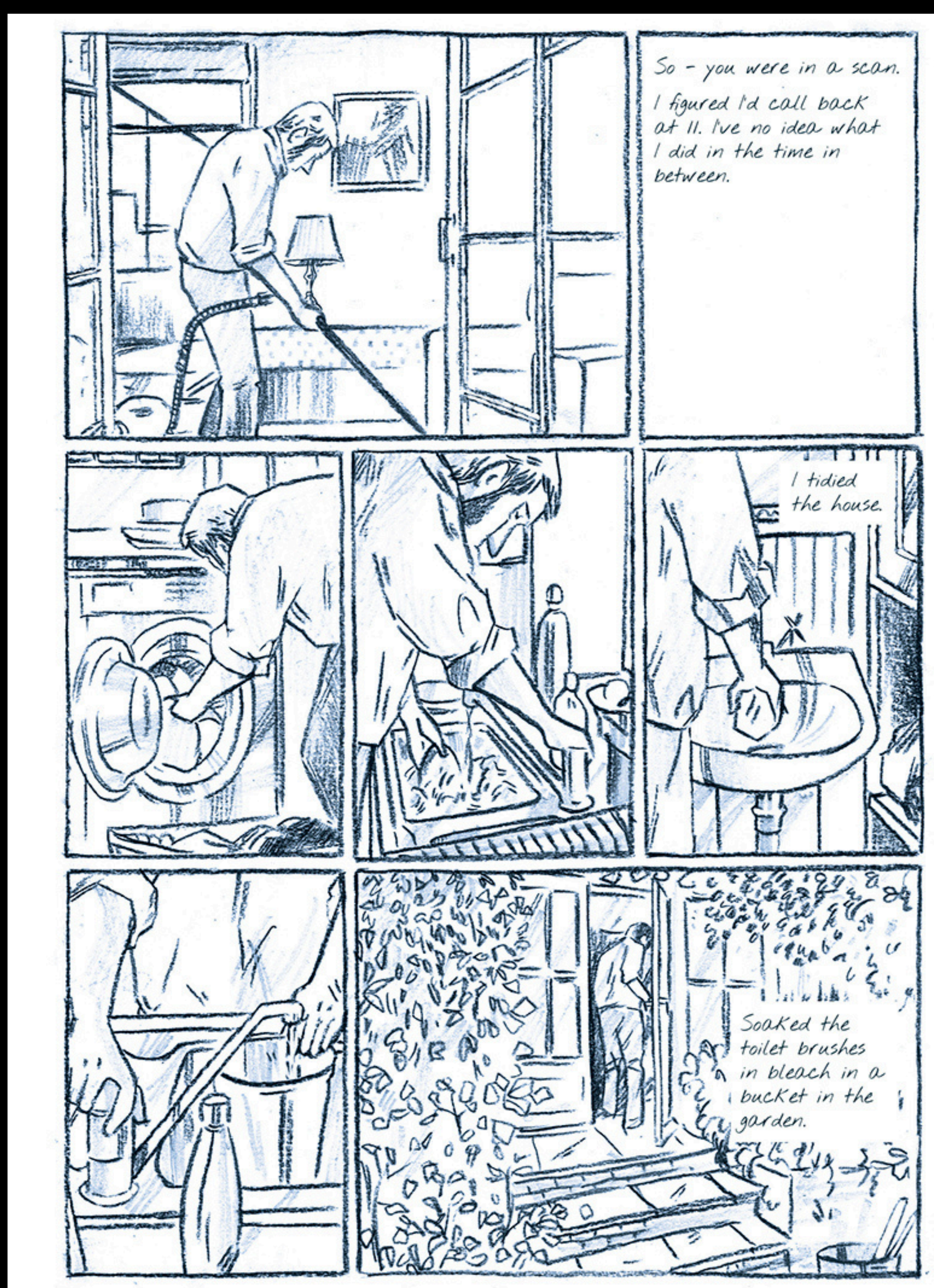
March [Book One], written by John Lewis and Andrew Ayden, and art by Nate Powell (2013).

MARBLES



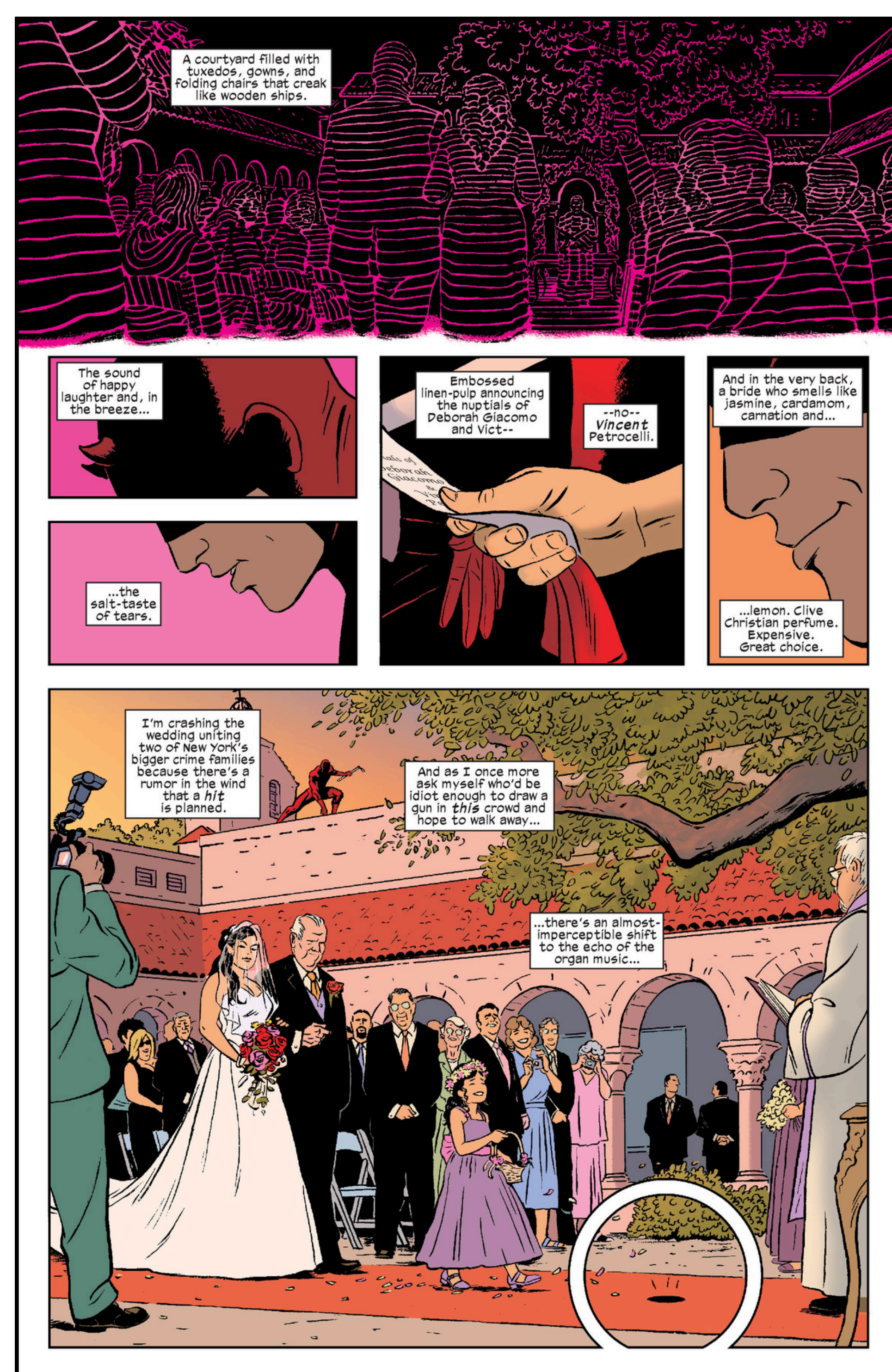
Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me, by Ellen Forney (2012).

COMA



Coma by Zara Slattery (2021).

DAREDEVIL 1



Daredevil 1, written by Mark Waid, drawn by Paolo Rivera, inked by Joe Rivera, and colored by Javier Rodriguez (2015).

CALL TO ACTION & BIOS

Thank you for learning with us about accessible comics and the unfolding possibilities! The Accessible Comics Collective needs your help to make this practice the norm, not the exception it is today.

THREE GUIDING VALUES LEAD THE WAY FORWARD:

1. There's no "one size fits all approach" to this work, as there is much diversity in what blind readers want when accessing a comic. We need to bring the same artful creativity that we bring to comics to comics access.
2. Good access will engage blind listeners while still honoring the comics form. It's an act of translation.
3. The expertise and feedback of the blind community must be central in leading the way forward.

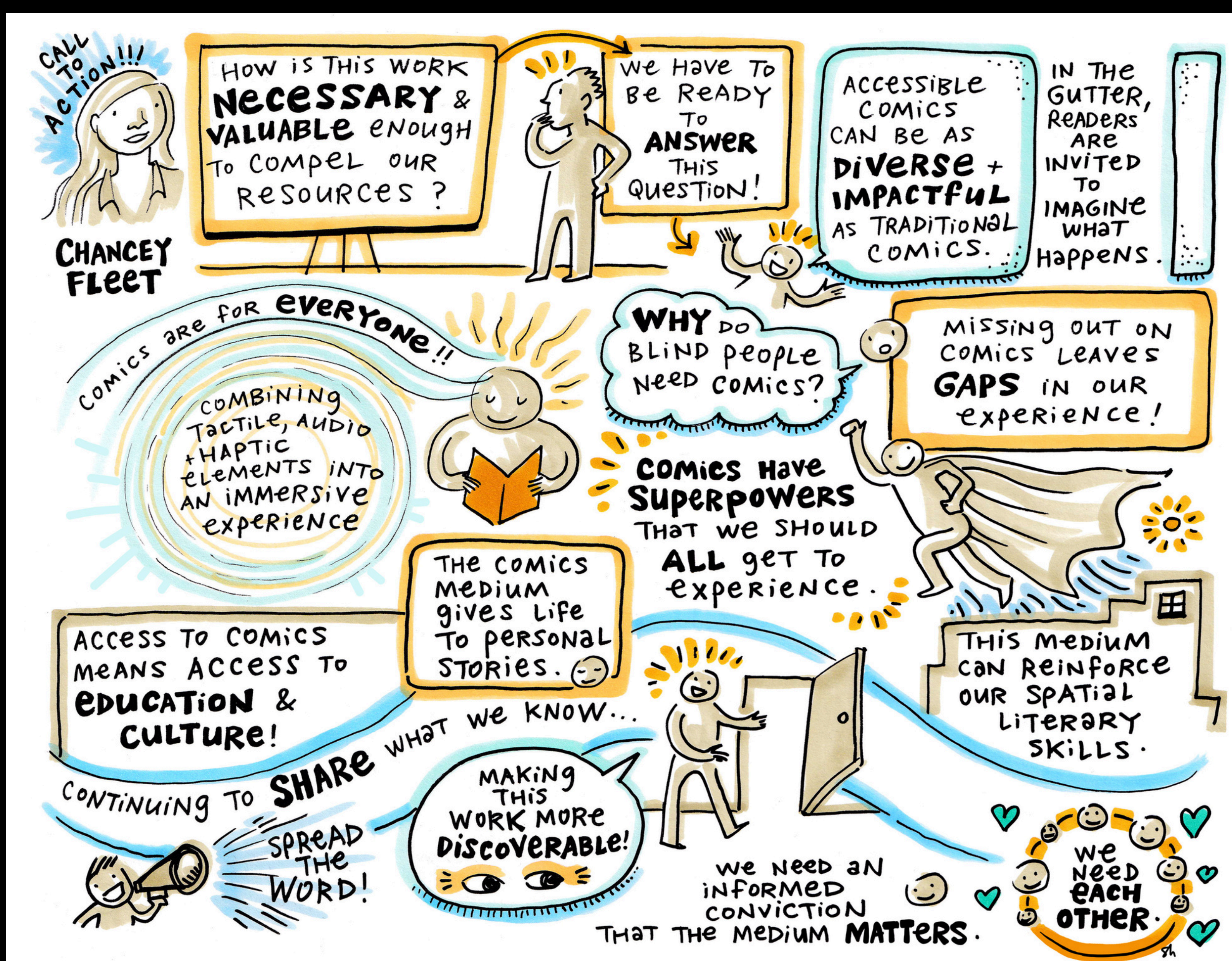
Scan to learn more about the **Accessible Comics Collective** and get involved!



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Emily Beitiks (beitiks@sfsu.edu)

SKETCHNOTE "CHANCEY FLEET"



This sketchnote was developed live by **Sam Hester** during the closing keynote at a symposium by the Accessible Comics Collective on August 12, 2021.

“

[Blind people] know that we can create demand and normalize access to comics because our community has done that same thing for text on the web, for the mobile web, for museums, and for so many other things. We know what we need [in order] to shape a more accessible future for comics: We need an informed conviction that the media matters—we can talk about that with stakeholders. We need a working knowledge of how meaningful, satisfying scalable access can happen—and what access techniques are suitable for different types of comics and situations. And more than anything, we need each other to stay in touch and also to amplify what we discovered today so much that every blind adult and child, every educator, every parent, every ally, every publisher knows that comics are for everyone and knows exactly what is possible.

-- ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR,
NY PUBLIC LIBRARY, CHANCEY FLEET

”

ABOUT THE CURATORS

In an effort to explore possibilities for access in comics, Nick Sousanis and Emily Beitiks, along with our colleague Yue-Ting Siu, came together in an interdisciplinary collaboration at San Francisco State University. After discovering how complex this work is, we started regularly collaborating to host public events to dive into the possibilities, and called this network of comic makers, access professionals, and blind comic enthusiasts, [the Accessible Comics Collective](https://www.accessiblecomicscollective.com).

Emily Beitiks is a leader in promoting creative forms of access in her role as [the Interim Director of the Longmore Institute on Disability](https://www.longmoreinstitute.org/) at San Francisco State University, learn more at [LongmoreInstitute.sfsu.edu](https://www.longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu).

Nick Sousanis is the author of *Unflattening* and [runs the comics studies program](https://www.spinweaveandcut.com) at San Francisco State University. You can learn more about his work on his website, [SpinWeaveAndCut.com](https://www.spinweaveandcut.com).

Graphics: Layout by **Shaina Ghuraya**, spot Illustrations by **Nick Sousanis**.

This work has been possible thanks to the support of an incredible network of colleagues who have participated in our Accessible Comics Collective work:

Jose Alaniz, Jane Burns, Nathan Burns, Chad Allen, Rick Boggs, Canan Çam Yücel, Áine Kelly-Costello, Ann Cunningham, Marieke Davis, Darren DeFrain, Chancey Fleet, Daniel Fontaine, Gina Gagliano, Hatiye Garip, Shaina Ghuraya, Max (a.k.a. Francisc Capdevila Gisbert), Rozi Hathaway, Illi Anna Heger, Sam Hester, Paddy Johnston, Esra Kaya, Georgina Kleege, Rae Lanzerotti, Anil Lewis, Lisa Madl, Ilan Manouach, Nefertiti Matos, Scott McCloud, Sky McLeod, Joshua Miele, Ryan North, Casey James O'Ceallaigh, Sile O'Mondrain, Charity Pitcher-Cooper, Silvana Rainey, Thomas Reid, Aaron Rodriguez, Brian Rutherford, M Sabine Rear, Walei Sabry, Matthew Shifrin, Joe Stretchay, Ed Summers, Michael Sutjiadi, Frank Welte, Samuel C. Williams, and Stanley Yarnell.

Particular thanks to our former co-collaborator **Yue-Ting Siu!**

Thanks as well to organizational support from:

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- The Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability
- The College of Liberal and Creative Arts at San Francisco State University
- MIT Technology Review and in particular Mat Honan and Allison Arieff
- All the organizers of the 2024 Graphic Medicine Conference!