

e-book

COSMO, FROM THE STARS



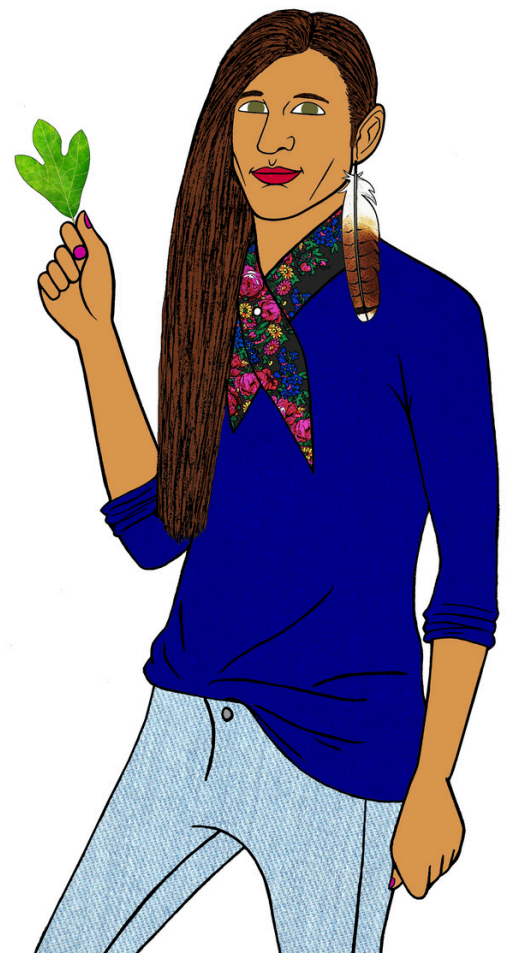
by itai jeffries, phd

**illustrated by
trae middlebrooks**

About this book!

Itai Jeffries, PhD (they/them) woke at 3am one morning with the idea for this book clear in their mind. This book is a part of a movement since the 1990s to (re)story the beauty and power of all gender-expansive people and youth, and to (re)member that Indigenous communities have long practiced the sharing of inclusive stories, community roles, and ways of being.

Itai (yesah/Occaneechi) is from rural North Carolina, but now stewards an urban microfarm with a flock of chickens. Itai and Trae (the artist) have been close friends for two decades. This is the second children's book produced by the duo. The first was **Sassy Sassafras: A Two Spirit Story**, completed in 2021 which exists in English and Spanish.



About the Artist!

Trae Middlebrooks (he/him) is a Black queer comic and graphic artist, librarian, and scholar from High Point, North Carolina.



Go to @trae.drew.that on Instagram to learn more about Trae's art!

En Memoria

**Nex Benedict
(2008 - 2024)**

**Sadé Heart of the Hawk Ali
(1947 - 2022)**

**Marlon Fixico Blackkettle
(1957 - 2022)**

**Tokitae
(1964 - 2023)**

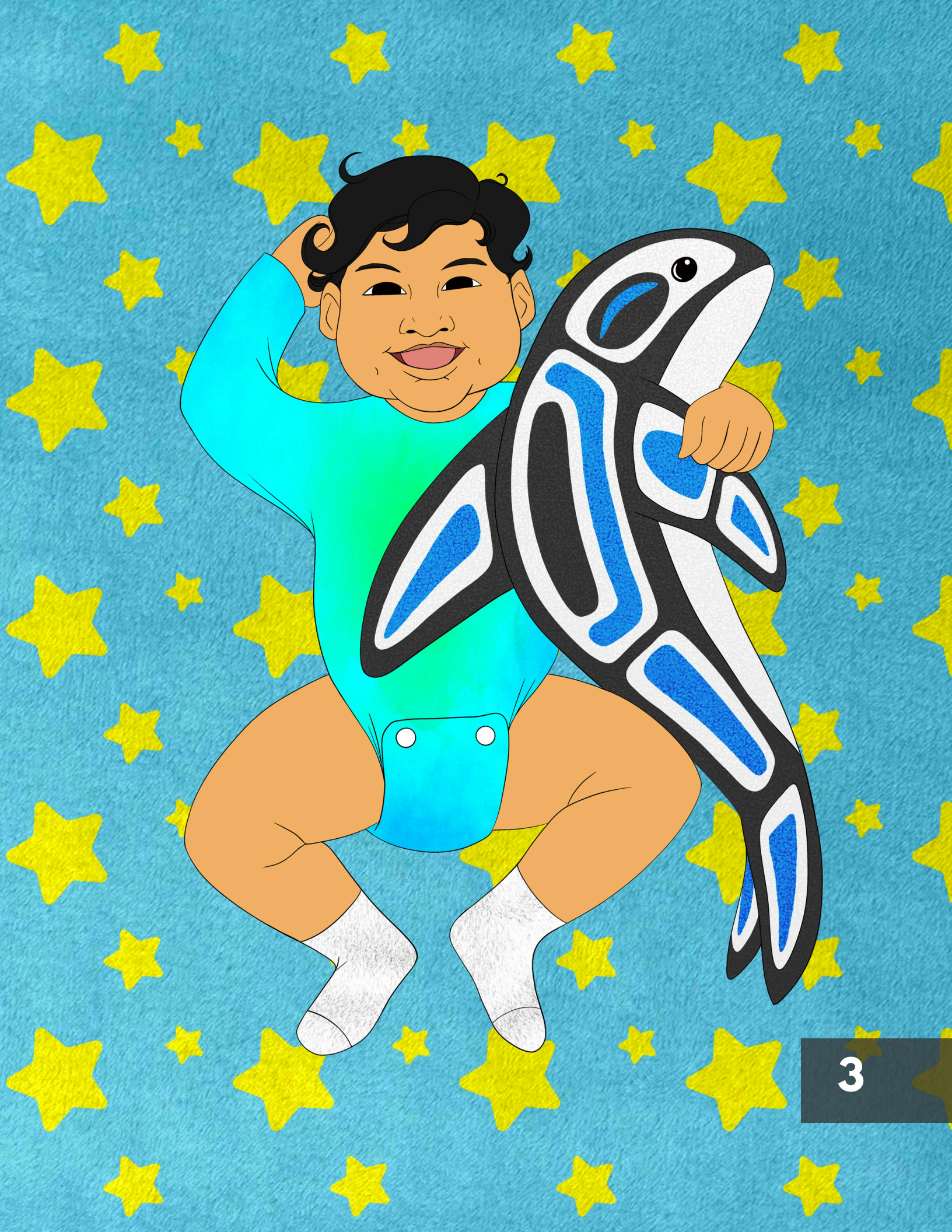
We remember the lives of precious beings who dwell in the Spirit World. They give us strength and remind us to live with purpose. We who remain traverse the paths they leave behind, the paths (re)membered.



On the day Cosmo was born, a comet crossed paths with Mother Earth. From that comet, the Ancestors sprinkled stardust over baby Cosmo.

This had been their plan.





When Cosmo was born, their mom named them Liza. That had been Cosmo's great-grandmother's name.



While Cosmo's mom did not know this at the time, great-grandma Liza had been in a circle with the Ancestors discussing a gift being sent to their living relatives.

That gift was baby Cosmo.

Great-Grandma Liza was joined by many Ancestors. One of them was known as Heart Dancer, a Two Spirit prayer person who lived among Cosmo's Nation many years ago.

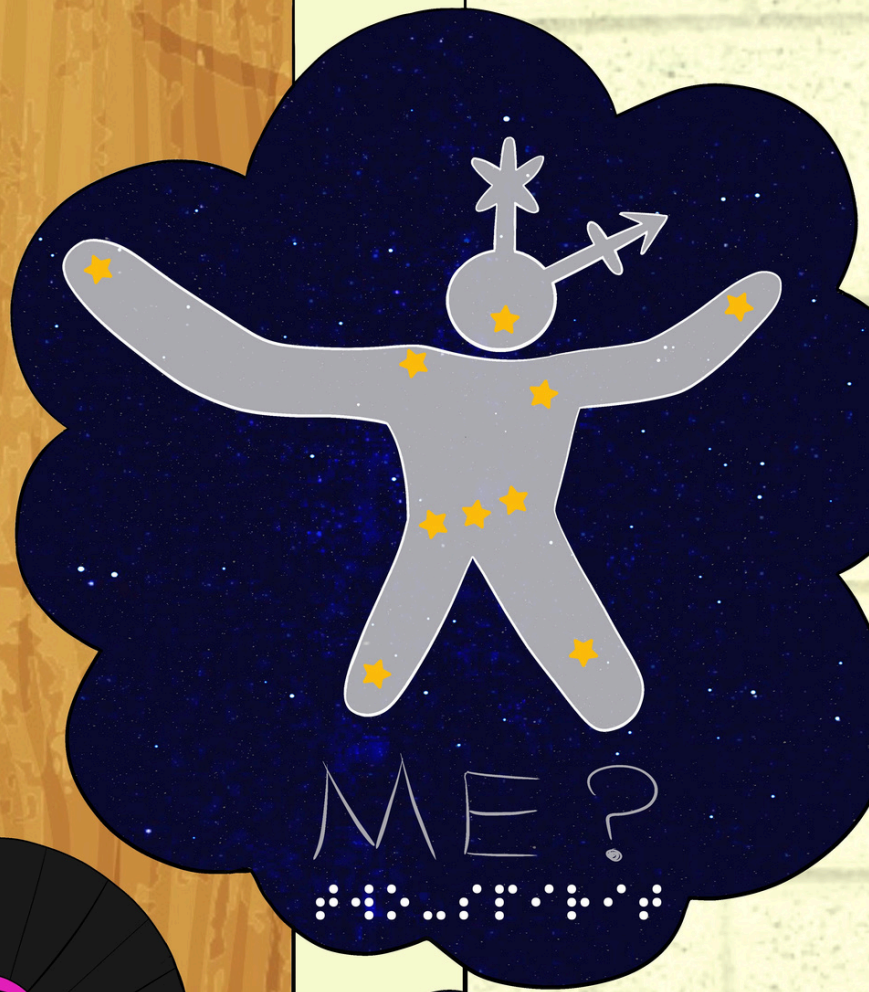


Cosmo, the Ancestors decided, was to be gifted to their People at a time when many in the community were lost and hurting.





Cosmo, blessed with an ancient way of being, often felt they didn't belong in this world.



The ways that Cosmo was taught to be a “girl” felt all wrong. Sometimes they felt as if their body, mind, and even their thoughts were all wrong.

Cosmo pushed ahead and found ways to feel more comfortable. That helped some.



Not everyone understood Cosmo. Still, they were able to find friends who accepted them and called them by their real name. Even their mom respected these wishes. Dad didn't understand at first, but he eventually came along.



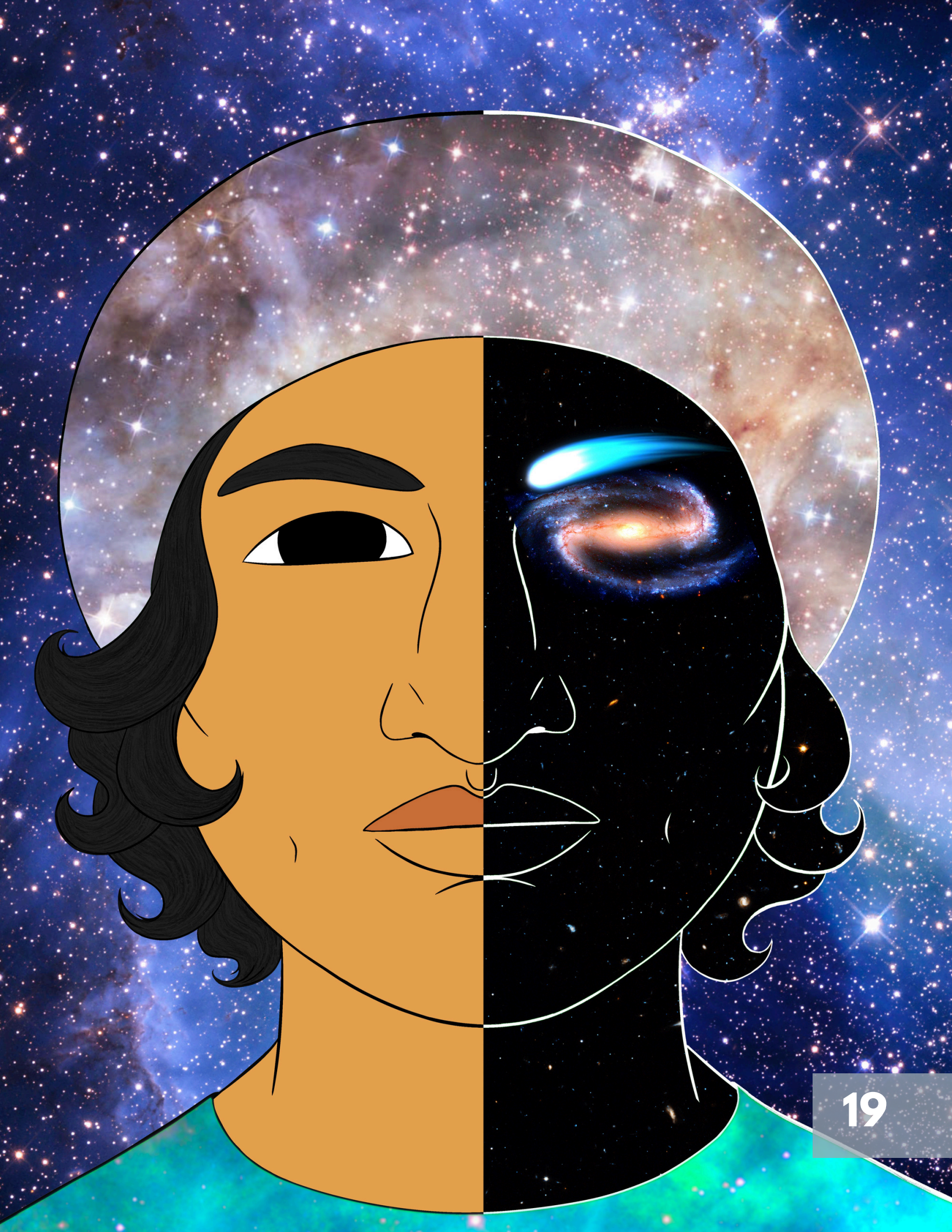


During Cosmo's teen years, their community was struck by a terrible epidemic. A virus took many lives, including those of loved ones.



Other epidemics were harming the People, too.

But fewer people spoke of them.



When Cosmo was very young, people from across their community thought they were an “old soul.”

This was the work of their Ancestors.

Cosmo always loved to be with the Elders in the community. They listened as the Elders prayed, and watched as they did things in the ways they've always done.





As Cosmo slept at night, their Ancestors began to share things with them.

When Cosmo woke in the mornings, they seemed to remember songs, stories, and wisdom that no living person had ever shared out loud.

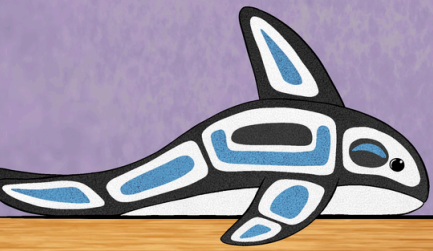
Cosmo began to share that wisdom, and sing those songs, and it brought tears to the eyes of their Elders.

The Ancestors watched proudly.





As Cosmo became an adult, they began offering their gifts to many in their community who were hurting. They shared songs, taught people to make cedar baskets, and they prayed with them.



Some gifted Cosmo with tobacco, cedar roses, and jam. Others brought them groceries and chocolate. Some had few things to gift, but offered blessings and gratitude. Cosmo was humbled by this.

INDIGIQUEER MEETUP



Cosmo also began to heal from feeling out of place. They realized that while they weren't like everyone else, they also belonged.

The Ancestors watched with pride as Cosmo brought some of the old world of ceremony back to the People.





The ceremonies looked different than they once had, but they felt familiar to the grateful Ancestors. The ceremonies were what this world needed. They were what Cosmo needed, too.

Cosmo is no superhero. They are a reminder that everyone is a gift. Everyone is brought here for a reason.

Two Spirit people, like Cosmo, remind us that just because someone may seem different or out of place doesn't mean that they don't belong among our People.

Our Ancestors have always known this.



Did you know?

Indigenous people in the Americas have had in-depth knowledge of the cosmos for millennia. Astrology was used to navigate, understand time and seasons, inspire creativity and much more. Featured on page 11 is an image of the Orion constellation, known to the Anishinaabe as Biboonke-nini, the “wintermaker” or the being who brings winter. While Cosmo’s story is fictional, many traditional Indigenous stories involve the cosmos and astrology.

Also on page 11, you will find “Two Spirit” in Braille on the sign with the constellation.

Robinson, N. (2023) “Orion and Big Dipper meet Biboonke-nini and Ojiig.” Sault This Week.

Did you know?

Resident Orca whales from the Salish Sea were illegally captured and sold by several corporations throughout the 1960s and 70s. These are sacred relatives of many of the coastal tribes of the region. Tokitae, the last of the Orcas caught during this era, died in captivity during the creation of this book. The Lummi Nation and others gathered to mourn her. Preparations were being made to return her to the Salish Sea before she passed away. Her ashes were returned to the Lummi Nation.

