About the Artists

Charlie LaGreca has worked professionally in the illustration comics industry for 16 years. It all started at DC Comics, where Charlie worked for three years as an artist in the bullpen. His work has been seen in comics, magazines, newspapers, TV, digital online media, ad campaigns, branding, corporate meetings, and live performances from such notable companies as Disney, Nickelodeon, DC Comics, Scholastic, Lego, Top Shelf Comics, Golden Publishing, Fortune Magazine, Fuse TV, Versus TV, Starwood Westin Hotels, and more.

Charlie has also created original comics for a number of companies including: Disney, Nickelodeon, Allied Waste, Action Tec, C2Creative, and most recently Boehringer Ingelheim. He is also one of the founders and Vice President of Comic Book Classroom and Denver Comic Con, a charitable organization that fosters literacy in socioeconomically challenged schools through the use of comic books.

Rebecca Bratspies is a Professor of Law at the CUNY School of Law where she is the founding director of the CUNY Center for Urban Environmental Reform. She writes about environmental regulation, especially questions of fairness and sustainability. She is a scholar with the Center for Progressive Reform, an appointed member of the ABA Standing Committee on Environmental Law, and a member of the Executive Committee of the AALS Section on the Environment. Rebecca lives in New York with her partner Allen and their daughter Naomi.

www.CenterForUrbanEnvironmentalReform.org
A Note from the Editor

I founded CUER to address the problem of environmental justice the unfair and unequal distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. Too many of our environmental ‘bads’ (polluting activities) wind up in poor communities, especially communities of color.

These communities are already overburdened and generally have far fewer environmental ‘goods’ (pools, trees, parks or green spaces.) Because environmental decisionmaking can be confusing and hard to understand, these communities often find themselves struggling even to take part in the decisionmaking process.

CUER’s mission is to change that! This book is a first step toward demystifying environmental decisionmaking. Through outreach and education, CUER helps communities identify and seize their moment to participate in environmental decisionmaking. By empowering communities to make their voices heard in environmental decisions that will affect them, I believe that decisions will be more fair, more democratic, and better for both humans and the environment.

We created this comic book to break down barriers. We hope that it will be a valuable resource for communities across New York and throughout the country.

Enjoy the book!

Rebecca Bratspies

Acknowledgments

This comic book is a project of the CUNY School of Law Center for Urban Environmental Reform. Its success is due to the help of many people. We would like to thank PS 122Q Principal Pamela Sabel, and teacher Dimitria Kamaris for making our collaboration with the students possible. Thanks to the SASF afterschool program for allowing our environmental justice comic book to be one of their after-school club activities. We especially want to thank our student collaborators for their help in making this project a success. Alex Serbanescu, Michael Espinosa, Alvi Bhuiyan, Shaik Abiden, Agniva Sinha, James Wang, Tiger Zhu, Anthony Lin, Gonzalo Palomino, Dinh Ha, Derek Yu, and Maria Dolores Alvarez all participated in a series of workshops with the artist Charlie La Greca and the editor Rebecca Bratspies. We could not have done this project without their help.
I BET YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

MAYBE YOU THINK IT'S SOME PRIME TIME COP SHOW ON TV.

OR A BUNCH OF ACTIVISTS WITH SIGNS IN SOME REMOTE FOREST GETTING ALL UP IN PEOPLE'S FACES.

MAYBE IT'S THE EARTH FIGHTING EVIL PLANETS FOR ITS LIFE.

WHATEVER IT IS, MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW UNTIL IT'S STARRIN' THEM IN THE EYES.

I HAD NO IDEA THAT IT ACTUALLY AFFECTS EVERY ONE OF US. THAT IS, UNTIL IT CAME TO MY HOME...
FORESTVILLE, NEW YORK

It's fine, Bina.
I been coming here for weeks.

Mayah, you sure we should be doing this?

THE FUTURE HOME OF GREEN SOLUTIONS

KEEP OUT!

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CHRONICLES: BOOK 1
MAYAH'S LOT
Written by Charlie La Greca & Rebecca Bratspies
Art by Charlie La Greca
YOU JUST GOTTA BE MY LOOKOUT.

BUT I WANT TO COME OVER AND HELP!

YOU KIDDIN'? YOU'RE MY TOP SPY!

IF ANYONE IS COMING, YOU GOTA LET ME KNOW. CAN YOU DO THAT?

OOH, I THINK SO.

‘CUZ I'M SUPER SPY!

DROP!

HOW ARE MY LITTLE PLANTS DOING?

NASTURTINIUM LOOKS GOOD...

I GOT A NEW FRIEND FOR YOU!

AZALEAS, TOO,

...A CHINESE ASPEN.

IT'S SPECIAL!

IT'S...
ONLY ONE SEED, MR. TATSUMI?

IT'S DIFFICULT FOR ASPEN SEEDLINGS TO GROW AMONG OTHER ASPEN.

SO YOU'LL NEED A SPECIAL SPOT FOR IT.

ONE ASPEN SEED CAN CREATE AN ENTIRE FOREST...

AHA!

DON'T THINK I SEE YOU, HUH? NO ONE ESCAPES SUPER SPY!

... FOR THE ENTIRE TREE AND ROOT SYSTEM OF A MOUNTAIN CAN SPRING FROM ONE SINGLE SEED.

HEY!
GET OVER HERE!

SO YOU'RE THE ONE THAT'S BEEN TRESPASSING.

WHAT'S A KID LIKE YOU DOING IN HERE?

THIS LOCK AIN'T FOR SHOW 'N' TELL.

I OUGHTA TAKE YOU IN.

YO, OFFICER!

FIGHT GOING DOWN AT THE DELI ON 114TH!

THEY NEED HELP!

I'LL CHECK IT OUT, AND DON'T LET ME SEE YOU OVER HERE AGAIN!

YOU OKAY, KID?

YEAH.

YOU GOT TO BE CAREFUL.

HERE...

YOU SHOULD COME ALONG WITH US, LEARN A LITTLE...

AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO FIND BETTER HELP.

NO ONE GETS PAST SUPERSPY!
QUIT MESSING OFF YOU TWO AND SET THE TABLE.

BUT THEN THIS MAN CAME AND SAVED MAYAH!

AND HE HAD A TANK THAT MADE A STRANGE WHEEZING NOISE.

THAT HELPS HIM BREATHE, I THINK.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TAKING YOUR LITTLE SISTER OVER THERE?

TWERP!

WHAT?

I SAW MR. TATSU IN THE SUBWAY. HE GAVE ME AN ASPEN SEED THIS TIME.

YOU EVER SEE THOSE?

NO, AND DON'T EVEN THINK OF PLANTING 'EM IN HERE. WE GOT ENOUGH OF YOUR ODITIES.

HUMPH
THE NEXT DAY

I KNEW YOU'D BE BACK.

HUU!

I SAW YOUR HARDOCK IN THE LOT.
WHATTA YA GOT THIS TIME?

CHINESE ASPEN.

SEEU THOSE UP NORTH.
BEAUTIFUL IN THE FALL, WE COULD USE SOME OF THAT HERE.

TELL YA WHAT: HOP OVER AND DO YOUR THINGS. JUST SAW THE COP GETTING COFFEE.

OK!

HUU!?

M.. MY GARDEH...
Hey! Get outta there! He's coming back!

Hurry!

Just in time...
Keep walking and act normal.

Hope Huff

I saw something in there, something we're probably not supposed to see.

The lot looked different than last time...

My garden was trampled, and I found this blueprint. I think they're going to start dumping there.

They can't just do that, they need approval.

Look, things just got real! This ain't a game, and I don't want you to do anything...

Other than come to our neighborhood meeting.

Deal?

Neighborhood Protection Troop 347

Deal...
I'm Mayah. By the way.

Troop
And hold onto it this time.
WELL, LOOK WHO IT IS!

YOU'RE GETTING HOME KINDA LATE, WHAT YOU UP TO?

NOT MUCH...
YOU KNOW THAT OLD LOT ON OFF LINCOLN AVENUE?

YEAH, THEY ARE LOOKING TO TURN IT INTO A WASTE DUMP AND STORE TOXIC POISONS THERE!

THE ONE RIGHT NEAR SCHULZ MIDDLE SCHOOL?

AYE, THEY BEEN WANTING TO DO SOMETHIN' WITH THAT LOT FOR A LONG TIME.

NOT MUCH...

YOU KNOW THAT OLD LOT ON OFF LINCOLN AVENUE?

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NOT MUCH...
YOU KNOW THAT OLD LOT ON OFF LINCOLN AVENUE?

THE ONE RIGHT NEAR SCHULZ MIDDLE SCHOOL?
THERE COMES A POINT WHERE YOU CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE...

OTHERS SIT IDLY BY WHILE PEOPLE WHO DON'T EVEN LIVE IN OUR HOOD DECIDE TO PUT LIQUID DEATH ON OUR LAND.

NEXT TO OUR SHOPS, CAFES, AND SCHOOLS.

BUT NOT ANYMORE Cuz...

EARTH

GIRL

ZAP!

...EARTH GIRL WON'T STAND FOR IT!!
MAYAH!

OH, CRUD, I SPACED OUT.

Y-k = a(x-h)^2
X-h = a(y-k)^2

Huh?

GYM CLASS

ALIMA, YOU WANNA GO WITH ME TO THIS MEETING TONIGHT? IT'S IMPORTANT CUZ THEY'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SCHOOL.

YOU TOLD ME ABOUT IT. IT SOUNDS WEIRD, AND I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYONE.

PLUS, MY PARENTS MIGHT TAKE ME SHOPPING FOR MY BIRTHDAY!

LUNCH

WOULD YOU LIKE ONE?

YOU'RE NOT EATING LUNCH?

I'M TRYING TO GET PEOPLE TO SHOW UP TO THIS COMMUNITY MEETING.

WHY?

THIS PLACE IS A DEAD ZONE, AND YOU'RE JUST GONNA GET IN TROUBLE. THINK ABOUT IT. IN TWO YEARS, WE... CAN BE OUTTA THIS HOLE, AT A NICE COLLEGE UPSTATE!

YEAH...

I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.
Everyone have a seat, we got a serious topic tonight.

I don't know if anyone caught the Public Notice regarding the lot on Lincoln and 12th.

It was hard to find in this week's paper, and it'd have snuck past me.

...had it not been for a new friend who I'm so glad... decided to come.

Wanna tell 'em what you saw?

Oh, okay. I've been in Forestville since I was born, and one of my favorite places to go is the lot troop mentioned.

Ugh.

Anyway, last week I hopped the fence, and my garden was destroyed and I found plans for toxic waste storage.

The agency has tentatively approved the permit for the facility, and the forty-five day comment period started last week.

So we gotta get our act together.

Thanks, Mayah.
LOS ANGELES.

Look if we get the Forestville approval, we'll be fine.

We've got to expand our waste handling capabilities. The investors are up in arms.

No one in that town is going to squawk, but we're running out of time.

You know what? I'll handle the hearings. Gotta go.

Good morning!

Why so glum?

Lulu, we need to execute on our tri-state waste strategy.

It's the key to building our market share.

I suggest we lay out a few more waste facilities.

Waterton looks pretty good.

Waterton has bad demographics, way too many homeowners, they're sure to fight us, and we can't afford the delay.

We already have Forestville tentatively approved.

All that's left is the public comment period and the local council vote...

And that will be easy.
GREEN SOLUTIONS IS OFFERING FORESTVILLE AN EXCITING REDEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE. IT'LL BRING MUCH-NEEDED INVESTMENT AND WILL REVitalize A BRIGHT VACANT LOT. WE TAKE TERRIFIC PRIDE IN OUR ABILITY TO GENERATE JOBS IN OUR PARTNER COMMUNITIES WHILE PROTECTING THE CHARACTER OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS WE SERVE.

OUR PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL STORAGE FACILITY WILL SUPPORT EXISTING BUSINESSES AND IMPROVE THE GENERAL ECONOMIC VITALITY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD. IT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION! WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN BUILD A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR FORESTVILLE!

WE COULD USE THE JOBS!

DOES THIS FIT WITH THE COMMUNITY'S DEVELOPMENT PLAN?

HOW DO THE NEIGHBORS FEEL?

THIS IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF WHAT WE CAN ACCOMPLISH TONIGHT...

WE'LL HAVE TO ADD THE NOTE TO A LATER DATE; EXACTLY THIRTY DAYS FROM TODAY.

IS THIS SAFE?

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR SAFETY RECORD.

I'M NOT CLEAR ON WHAT IT IS.

LULU IS TELLING US AN ENVIRONMENTAL STORAGE FACILITY, BUT IT'LL ACTUALLY HOLD TOXIC AND BIO-MEDICAL WASTE.

TANK YOU.

THE COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO CALL THIS MEETING TO ORDER.

LULU, YOU CAN BEGIN WHEN YOU'RE READY.
THANKS EVERYONE,  
GREAT TURNOUT LAST WEEK!  
AFTER OUR SHOW OF FORCE  
AT THE PUBLIC HEARING,  
WE HAVE A REAL CHANCE.  
THIS IS OUR ONE SHOT TO  
MAKE THEM CHANGE THEIR  
MINDS.

WE NEED TO  
GET TO WORK!  
720PM AND I HAVE A  
PROPOSED DIVISION OF  
LABOR.  
EACH GROUP NEEDS TO  
TAKE ONE TASK.  
LET'S SPLIT UP  
AND KEEP IN TOUCH  
VIA E-MAIL.

GROUP 1:  
YOU’LL BE IN CHARGE  
OF SOCIAL NETWORKING,  
E-MAIL AND BLOGGING.

GROUP 2:  
YOU’LL BE ON AIR  
POLLUTION AND TRAFFIC  
MONITORS.

I SPY  
SEVENTEEN  
TRUCKS!

GROUP 3:  
YOU’LL BE ON PUBLIC  
AWARENESS AND  
PAPERING.

GET INVOLVED!  
DON’T LET  
GREEN SOLUTIONS  
POLLUTE OUR  
NEIGHBORHOOD!

GROUP 4:  
EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS.  
TWO FIREHOSES  
HAVE CLOSED AND  
THE NEAREST HAZARDOUS  
MATERIALS WAREHOUSE  
IS ACROSS THE RIVER.

GROUP 5:  
COMPANY RESEARCH,  
PAST REPORTS  
AND SAFETY RECORDS.

JUST WHAT I  
WAS LOOKING FOR.
ON BEHALF OF GREEN SOLUTIONS, WE’D LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU.
WE LOOK FORWARD TO PARTNERING WITH YOU TO BUILD FORESTVILLE’S FUTURE.

ACCORDING TO EPA, 60% OF THE POPULATION LIVES IN NON-COMPLIANCE FOR OZONE, SULPHUR OXIDES, AND PARTICULATE MATTER.
THIS FACILITY WILL MAKE OUR AIR QUALITY EVEN WORSE!

WE COUNTED FIFTY TRUCKS A DAY DRIVING BY THE LOT. THAT’S 700 TRUCKS PER DAY.

THERE WAS A BIG FIRE THREE WEEKS AGO AND THERE WEREN’T ENOUGH FIREFIGHTERS TO RESPOND. THEY’RE STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT AND THEY DON’T HAVE HAZMAT SUITS!

ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH’S WEBSITE, WE HAVE ONE OF THE HIGHEST ASTHMA RATES IN THE STATE.

I’D LIKE TO PRESENT A FULL REPORT ON GREEN SOLUTIONS’ COMPLIANCE HISTORY AND THE FINES THEY’VE PAID.

WE’RE REACHED A UNEAVISUAL DECISION.
THE PROPOSAL TO SITE THIS FACILITY IS...

WE WERE RECONVENING ON THE PUBLIC COUNCIL REGARDING THE GREEN SOLUTIONS’ FACILITY.

THANK YOU COUNCIL, OPEN THE FLOOR.

COUNCIL WILL NOW CLOSE THE FLOOR AND BREAK FOR FINAL DECISION.

AND THEN, THE WAIT...

DENAID
So, you want to know what **environmental justice** is?

It's **people coming together to improve their community, standing strong, finding a legal solution**.

Just like the roots of the **aspen**, we're all tied to each other, holding our cities or towns together.

Did you know that the aspen is one of the **only trees that can survive forest fires**?

In a blaze of 450 degrees, the aspen's root system runs so deep and strong, that not only can it survive, but it most often comes back...
DEDICATION and THANKS

Rebecca Bratspies

Thanks go to CUNY Law Dean Michelle Anderson and Associate Dean Meredith Gibbs, as well as to the Committee Members who funded this project through the CUNY Law School Innovation Fund. Special thanks to Carmen Rana for her work in printing and compiling the book.

This comic book is dedicated to my daughter Naomi Florence Schulz who already has an unwavering dedication to “saving the erth,” and to her cousins Andrew Cho who asked for a tree for his birthday, and Samuel Cho who is unfailingly generous. I hope that they, along with their cousins Scott and Matthew Bratspies, Audrey Battaglini, and the rest of their generation, will do a better job than we did.

Charlie La Greca

Thanks to Rebecca Bratspies for making this project possible and for introducing me to a plethora of new ideas about environmental justice. I appreciate her unwavering support for me to get in, get dirty and create.

Thanks as well to my brother and long-time collaborator Jeff for his input and inspiring ideas. Additional thanks to Committee Members who funded this project through the CUNY Law School Innovation Fund. Andrew Bif Covalt, Mario Gonzales, Carment Rana, PS 122 and the kids who actually helped us craft the book, B Allen Schulz, my mother and Father, my family, friends and ALL of my friends at Comic Book Classroom.

This book is dedicated to my own ‘Earth Girl’, Ami Heinrich, a true inspiration, nothing but supportive, and a fierce advocate of mother Gaia.

Environmental Justice Chronicles Book 1 MAYAH’S LOT copyright 2012 by the CUNY Center For Urban Environmental Reform.

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LEARN MORE ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

LULU is an acronym for “locally undesirable land use.” Many environmental justice issues involve LULUs like powerplants, waste facilities, and other polluting activities.

Environmental Justice means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/

Fair treatment means that no person or group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental impacts resulting from industry, development, and commerce.

Meaningful involvement means that potentially affected communities have an opportunity to participate in making the decision, and that their contribution can influence the outcome.

Executive Order 12,898 (signed by President Clinton, 1994) told all federal agencies to make environmental justice part of their mission. To do that, federal agencies are supposed to identify and address any “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects” of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.


Many states have similar environmental justice policies—the New York Department of Environmental Conservation has an Office of Environmental Justice.


We can achieve environmental justice by:

- Protecting the environment and health in overburdened communities;
- Empowering communities to take action to improve their health and environment;
- Establishing partnerships between local, state, tribal, and federal government agencies and community-based organizations to achieve healthy and sustainable communities.


Further Reading:

- This Borrowed Earth: Lessons from the Fifteen Worst Environmental Disasters Around the World, Robert E. Herman (2010).
- WeAct has compiled a great list of books for children and adults.

http://www.weact.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=95ptXGO3LQ%3D&tabid=186
CUNY School of Law is the premier public interest law school in the country. The school’s mission is to trains lawyers who will advocate for the underprivileged and disempowered, and who will work for social justice in their communities.

At the CUNY Center for Urban Environmental Reform (CUER), we believe that environmental justice is a cornerstone of social justice. Our mission it to help communities participate fully and meaningfully in the environmental decisions that affect them. CUER serves as a clearinghouse for the data, experts, and training needed to create a more level playing field in environmental decision making. CUER works to expand public participation in order to make environmental outcomes more democratic and more just.

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