NAAT’ÁANII
I began writing this comic in 2010 when I was a Freshman in high school. I started character designs a few years later as a Senior in 2014. The comic finally came to life when I applied for the Seabury Fellowship in September 2017.

This comic book isn’t solely for entertainment, it’s to educate on the reality of growing up on the Navajo Reservation as an interracial Navajo. For myself, and for many members of my family, it wasn’t easy living on the rez.

My first encounter with racism, that I remember, was with one of my school teachers. She asked me what I was, I didn’t really understand the question, but I remembered my dad told me I was Navajo.

So, that’s what I told her.

She looked at me quizically and said, “Yes, but you’re not full. You’re not really Diné.”

I was four. I went home that day unsure of myself, and from that point on began the evergoing battle of my identity. The next seventeen years, I would become accustomed to hearing, “What are you? Really? You don’t look Native, Are you sure you’re not Asian?”

And my all time favorite, “That’s your dad?”

I was questioned and mocked because I didn’t “look Native”. I was always asked to “pick a side” or “claim” one or the other. To many, I was an abomination, a mutt, an outcast. But, to my grandfather, I was something beautiful.

One thing I learned from my grandfather, Lloyd House, was to love people regardless of what they thought about me. The legacy of my grandfather, a man who was Navajo and Oneida, yet he didn’t “look Native”, was to love people, and to help people. He taught me to see beyond my skin color, that I was more than what people wanted from me.

He taught me that I am Navajo, Oneida, and Spanish; I didn’t need to take a side, because before all that, I am me.
DEDICATED TO:

Dr. Lloyd House

“You’ll never do anything, unless you try.”
SPECIAL THANKS:

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I am not defined by the color of my **skin**.

I am defined by the color of my **character**.
I never really understood why graduating high school was such a big deal. You should graduate, I mean, come on, it says something about you if it was a miracle that you got out of high school, especially in this place.

High school isn’t hard. What comes after is hard. You have to figure out what you’re going to do with yourself.

Are you going to college? Are you going to work?

Are you going into the military?

If you’re going to college, where are you going?

What are you going to study and how are you going to pay for it?

Rik, did mom tell you to come straight home from school today?

Nope. She tell you that?

Yeah, looks like she’s not too happy about me getting a D in English.

Well, I wouldn’t be either. You know what you’re doing. You’re just lazy.
You're not getting any sympathy from me, you had that coming to you.

You never should've planted a smoke bomb in her car.

That's not fair dude, Ms. Begay totally has it out for me!

She never proved it! Man, I'm gonna miss out on practice!

Don't miss anymore, you got a bout coming up and you can't afford to miss any more practices.

"You have a bout coming up."

Also, I think you should be worried about being late to class, Alarik.
Alright class, I'm going to make a quick run to the office. So work on the homework while I'm out, Jason, you keep an eye on the class.

I don't get why everyone feels the need to turn up the decibels when an adult leaves the room. Everyone is so noisy, it's making my head hurt even more.

Is there something wrong Rik?

Nothing is wrong Lorinda, thanks for asking though.

Are you sure? You're kind of pale.
Nah, he was born that way, ain't that right bilagaana?

Better than being born deghiis.

Did you just call me stupid?

Halfbreed bastard?

Man, it must shame your family to know that a "mutt" speaks better Navajo than a "purebred" Dine'.

What would you know about being Dine'?

Your dad wasn't even around long enough for you to know him.

You're right, my dad died before I could get to know him, but there's one thing I do know.

He wasn't a glahni. And he loved my mom, regardless of her color.
I think what really bothers you is that my "white" mom takes care of me.

And your mom drinks ocean on the weekend with the rest of your useless family.

Go to hell!

Only if I get to take you with me!
Principal's office!

Enough!

Now!

ENOUGH!

PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE!

NOW!
Mom, I--
I know why you did it. I’m not happy about it.

but I don’t know what I would do if I were in your situation.

What?

But I don’t know what I would do if I were in your situation.

I get it.

No you don’t.
They want nothing to do with us because we can't choose a side. We don't fit into the "Us" and "Them" paradigm.

I don't mean that disrespectfully, but you don't.

You may have kids that are Navajo, but it's different for you mom. You have no obligation to stay here. You're not tied to this place.

Ever notice that all the racist remarks we get are directed at me and my brothers? But never at you. Sure, they say stuff about you, but never to your face. If anything people like you.

But, when I walk in the room what happens?

It gets quiet or someone says something to one of us.

They're okay with you mom because you've "chosen a side". They want nothing to do with us because we can't choose a side. We don't fit into the "Us" and "Them" paradigm.
Do you really think that your dad and I didn't have problems when we got married?

No, but it's different.

Is hearing that your children are being abused because of it.

No it's not.

The hardest thing about being white, is hearing that your children are being abused because of it.

I just want you to know that you are not alone in this.

You rely on yourself too much, and you're so busy with making sure that your brothers are okay.
LEARN TO TURN TO YOUR BROTHERS AND DON'T FORGET THAT I'M HERE TO HELP YOU TOO

I'M SORRY MOM. I'M JUST TIRED... TIRED OF BEING IDENTIFIED BY MY SKIN COLOR.

WELCOME TO THE CLUB.

YOU CAN'T CHANGE PEOPLE. YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO GROW THICKER SKIN.

MOM!

WE'RE BACK!

DID YOU GET THE GROCERIES?

YEAH.
You never miss practice. Where were you?

Playing hookey?

No, I was not playing hookey. I got--

Mom! I'm home!

I got into a fight. Again?

What happened?

Well, I--

Groan!

Rough day bud?

Mreh.

Sit up.

Mmeh.
I don't get it man, why don't you just pound him into the ground? He'll just look like a bully.

I can take care of myself, thank you very much.

That, is exactly why I'm not going to do that and he'll just go after Don.

I don't get it man, why don't you just pound him into the ground?

He'll probably leave you alone.

He'll just look like a bully.

That's cute.

HA!

That's cute.
Don't start.

Did I ask you? Aw man, did I tell you what happened in Chem today?

This is it, that's who I am and it's who we are.

My mom believes that names should have meaning. Which is why our names are "Weird".

Devlyn means fierce, and boy, he lives up to it.

At least they're not made up.

Galen means healer, it may not seem like it but his quiet disposition hides someone who genuinely wants to help people.

She always reminds us what our names mean and that the only way to bring out our full potential we have to work together. Rely on each other. Some days, that's easier said than done. But, other days, it's almost like we're a pack.

Donatello, gift from God, I guess he really was a miracle. Looking at him you wouldn't be able tell, seeing how tall he is but he was a premi and almost died when my mom went into labor.

Then there's my name, Alarik, a little pretentious if you ask me, it means noble leader.
Honey, are you going to see your grandfather today?

Mhm.

You're not stopping by the flea market to get him a Navajo burger, are you?

Mmm.

Are you bringing the boys?

Mhm.

Be careful. It's first of the month so everyone will be out on the roads.

Mhm.

Always.
Hey, no Hogan!
Hi Ch’eii, how’re you doing?

As well as an old man can be, shyi’ayz.

You think a grease-filled hunk of steak and frybread will lift your spirits?
THAT NIGHT.
Hey bud, how'd you get in here?

What the--
Am I dreaming?
AFTER THAT NIGHT, MY LIFE WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME.
END OF PART 1
Script

Early sketches

Mood designs
Base Sketches
Shi ei Naakaaii Dine’ei nishli. Deshchii’nii ei bashishchiin. Aadoo che’ii’ digahii’ ei dashicheii doo. Tsenijikini ei dashinali.

I am born of the Mexican People, and born for the Red-Streaked People. My maternal grandfather’s clan is turtle, and my paternal grandfather’s clan is Cliff-Dwellers.

Here’s an interesting bit history, in May 1942, two hundred young Navajo men were recruited by the United States Marine Corps, twenty nine of those men were shipped off to boot camp and at Camp Pendleton a code was created, for the Pacific Front of the war because Japanese forces had continued to break and intercept our transmissions.

Those men created a code within a code, one of the code words they used in the war for identifying a tank was the Navajo word for turtle: che’ii’ digahii’

My grandfather’s clan from his mother, who was Oneida is Turtle.

I created a logo that would have a lot of meaning, and something that would spark conversation.