Biidaaban: the aim is liberation

Story & Art by Estrella R. Whetung
Biidaaban: The Aim is Liberation

by
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INTRODUCTION

“Our children don’t need heroes that uphold the law, they need heroes who
uphold their responsibilities” – Karen Whetung

“Biidaaban: The Aim is Liberation” is a graphic novel that details a futuristic alternate universe,
though one much like our own in terms of colonial processes, in which indigenous peoples are fighting
for liberation. When I first started this project, one thought that came to mind was, “How do we create
new stories in our communities?” If we are aiming to reach certain goals within our communities as
indigenous peoples, then we must first envision what we are looking to achieve. Storytelling in
conjunction with visual imagery is by no means a new concept for indigenous peoples, so I put forth
this graphic novel as an extension of a much older method rather than a drastic departure from
Nishinaabeg ways. The process of creating this work has aided in bringing together family and
community members to discuss a crucial matter—what we want for the next seven generations and
what we are currently doing to make sure that future happens.

While I was partaking in coursework for the Indigenous Governance Program, I had begun to
explore different mediums for discussing colonialism with indigenous youth. What became clear was
that there was a noticeable void of works directed at indigenous youth that explicitly spoke about
colonialism and the impacts of colonization on our peoples. Further, I chose to use the graphic novel
format specifically because of its wide appeal across many cultures and age groups. Although, I
recognize that there are artists worldwide, particularly in Asia and Latin America, who are creating
works that address processes such as imperialism in the comic book and graphic novel format.
Nonetheless, I felt that this would be a unique opportunity to create an indigenous story that explicitly
discusses colonization and liberation in a graphic novel format. Indigenous youth experience
colonialism everyday, but it is important that we give them the opportunity to identify it as well as expose them to methods of decolonization from an early age. Using my experience working with visual art and creative writing, I set forth upon creating the bare bones of a story that would address these issues in the wider indigenous community as well as stir discussion within my own family.

In the Summer of 2009, I began working with the idea of an inter-generational story that was set in the future and incorporated science fiction as well as fantasy elements. Further, I wanted the genesis of the story to begin with a grandmother storyteller having a conversation with her granddaughter. I started the process of creating a handful of characters to represent indigenous peoples (from Nishinaabe and other indigenous territories) as well as settlers (aliens from Jupiter's moon, Europa). Moreover, I knew that I wanted the ending of the story to be liberation for my indigenous characters, but I had not worked out what the process would be to achieve such a goal. I then worked on several pieces of preliminary concept art to represent the main characters. In the Fall of 2009, I set about creating a number of research questions and wanted the answers to these questions to help build the story. Initially, I wanted to know what attributes were deemed important in a person and what values should be passed on to future generations. Additionally, I was interested in what the future might look like for indigenous peoples as well as what justice means and how is it achieved. Lastly, I wanted to see what strategies people would employ to achieve liberation.

I spent several months interviewing family, friends, and community members in Nishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Tongva, Lekwungen, WSANEC, and Tagalog territories. For those that I could not meet with in person, an electronic version of the interview questions was circulated. After all the interviews were collected, I began looking for themes that were occurring and then organized the answers within these themes and sub-themes. I wanted these themes to become the backbone of the
story as well as the plot line. Once this was completed, I began to flesh out the characters in terms of their personal stories, motivations, and eventual pathways. After the basic framework of the story came together, I was tasked with writing a script that detailed the dialogue and action within the story. Throughout this entire process, I drew from the wonderful ideas and conversations that sprung from the research interviews I had with family, friends, and community members. In the Spring of 2010, I worked on refining character designs, set designs, basic concept imagery, and then began basic storyboarding. Eventually, I began drawing individual panels by hand and then editing them together with text as well as other graphics on my computer. The outcome of this tedious process is a graphic novel that has been born from the love, generosity, and strength of those I hold dear.

The intention of this project was to collaborate with family members, friends, and community members to create a graphic novel that illustrates colonization, the affects of colonialism, and the paths one may take toward a better future for the next seven generations. Each person, both indigenous and settler, who participated in this project spoke with candor in sharing their thoughts with me. Therefore, I was able to create a story that has a heart by working with the various ideas that flowed from these conversations. Ultimately, disseminating provocative and sometimes explosive knowledge (in this case, illustrating the raw brutality of colonialism and a young woman's pathway to liberation) is a tradition that has occurred in a continuous line of resistance for many indigenous peoples. As noted in the opening quote to my introduction, a new or perhaps more accurately an old kind of hero needs to be born into the minds and hearts of our young people. Seven generations ahead!
Imagine a world much like our own, but the superpowers of the world have shifted to Asia - with China at its centre.

Nookoo! Tell me that story again!

Oh my! Which one, my girl? There are so many stories to tell and so many more to learn.
It was a long time ago and our land was sick and poisoned—without a true love for the land, it is hard to have a healthy relationship with it. Imperial empires collapsed...

...And new empires hungry with greed rose quickly replacing them like insect mounds. However, the land cannot replenish itself as fast as the impatient two-leggeds would desire...

...When I was not much bigger than you, two-leggeds were always searching to replace what they had stolen from the land...

...They thought of the land as something to be sold, pillaged from, and owned. It took a long time for them to realize that they no longer had options...

...They could not look to the land for help, so the two-leggeds began to seek solace in the stars and places far from home...

...There were outrages from the people when famines, pandemics and wars broke out. Technology was no longer the saviour they once thought it was...
...There were no answers from the governments, other than that colonizing Mars and making use of the space station were the best alternatives. Mizukumnikwe would not take further abuse to help build TERRA-02 and on Mars. As temperatures rose to a fever pitch, we saw the end of the dream of renewable energy and the onset of Global Warming...

It's hard to imagine what it would be like living then. There were many horrible things that happened, but it's important to always use our ingenuity.

It's just not fair!! What? That you didn't see the Technological Age? Ask your brother Dwaam—he would know.

No... That our family suffered such loss... My girl, you will understand someday. Even in the toughest times... Remembering that loss will help.

Ah, You're right. What's the promise that you keep, my girl?

To remember the stories and pass them on...

Ha! Ha! Now, you tell me how the story goes...

In the year 2082, Ningitchiookoo, my mother's grandmother passed on. But, not without telling my mother Minens to remember the stories and to do right by the next Seven Generations. I was born one year later in a time that can only be described as chaotic.
CHAPTER 1 (2082 – 2083): THE EVENT

Pamidasgwodayong: Lake of the Burning Plains

My time here is ending...

You'll still be here with us in your own way.

I feel a change is coming... it makes my bones grow cold...

That may be. The world I have grown in has been filled with change. Let me get you another blanket.

She's gone, Ma!

She's gone!

I can't believe she's gone!

I can't even bear this!!

She's my mother. Of course I understand, Minens.

What happened, Dwaam?!

You'll never believe it! A message from the Western Capital!! Some aliens from a place called Europa have arrived!

WE ARE BEINGS FROM JUPITER'S MOON EUROPA. DO NOT FEAR US. WE HAVE COME WITH ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TO HELP EARTH BEINGS.

WE ARE BEINGS FROM JUPITER'S MOON EUROPA. DO NOT FEAR US...
In 2082, The Event happened. Alien life forms from Jupiter's moon, Europa, arrived on Earth claiming to have new and helpful technology. They said that this would be the birth of a Neo-Technological Age—a time that would bring wonderful advances to the Earth.

Things were fine before Nodin.

I just want the best for our girl... For Ren...

New regime, old regime. Who cares what planet they're from.

They're building onto the Mars Colony and the old space station.

It's just another empire coming into power.

Aw! Come on, don't be like that. Ren could be on another planet someday.

Ma's right... they haven't exactly been forthcoming in telling us what they want in return.

And what is the price paid for all this?

They're even building Terra Biodomes that will be able to replenish the land-- make it the way it used to be.

Mars

The Ayton Work Camp
Pamidatqodayung: Lake of the Burning Plains

What are you doing, Mama?

Just packing some food for your Dad.
He's accompanying Uncle Dwaam to the capital for the big election.

Uncle Dwaam wants to represent our region and make sure our voices are heard.

Election?!?

They can hear us just fine though!

Oh no, he just wants to make sure the Europeans hear us out collectively.

If he wins, that is...

She sure loves her invisible friend.

Be mindful, Ren!

Oh! Okay!
Off to see Gazzhoo!

You know, they just finished construction on the Terra Biodomes around Alodia...

Ah! This again!

Hey! They look nice!

And what about the Terra 'Domes? When do we get to step inside one of those things?
Ha! Ha! Who knows! Maybe we should move to the Mars Colony? I hear there are a lot of jobs out that way.

Mars Colony!? They're really pushing it with that Enjoy Mars campaign! Bombarding us with ads! Ah! You know how I feel about moving anyway. The further we go from this land, the fainter the sound of its heartbeat.

You and your superstitions! A job is a job, right?

Maybe so.

If that's how it is, then why don't we move to Terra-02 while we're at it!!

Right in the middle between Mars and Earth on a floating hunk of metal?!

No thank you!

Exactly. And I don't want to be stuck on a floating red rock!

Ah! I hear Ren coming in...

What are the chances of Dwaam being elected, anyway?

I'm not sure. It's up to the Europan Prophet Antigon. He's the one who appoints the regional and sectoral governors for the Empire.
Emperor Arno, we are trying, but many members of the old religion are resistant to conversion. They insist on holding on to the old ways.

We cannot have them carrying on these heretic ideas! I am their true ruler chosen from the Lord of our world. They must obey me! Sending agitators to the Work Camps was not persuasive enough.

Emperor, what do you wish to happen?

Make good use of them, General! Put them to work in the mines.

Also, seek out and kill the leaders of the old religion. Those who are left standing will be lost without their guidance.
Breaking news! Government dissidents have begun their transport to the Mars Colony. After the primary leaders were exiled for treacherous assaults against our beloved Emperor Arno, a second more aggressive rebellion began. The dissident leadership is now to be exec...

Fyn, my daughter, do not forget anything that we taught you. Carry out the way of our branch.
Listen to me, Fyn. There are lies that followers of the new religion will tell you about your father and me, but do not believe them. I want you to bring good to all of our people.

Mother, I promise. I will.

Affirmative. We are arriving at the location now, sir.

Agi and Freya of Jorga, you will now be moved to the holding cells at the Execution Centre.

We love you, Fyn!

Be strong, daughter!

Mother! Father! Please! Don't leave me!!
Pamidasgwdayong: Lake of the Burning Plains

Dwaam is different now... moving to Alodia, living a fancy lifestyle, winning and dining European ambassadors and always off to conferences on Europa.

Mhmhm.

It isn't just that he hasn't come home. He has changed as a person! He's so disconnected from our peoples. He's alienated from the land! Did you hear that he passed a new mining bill?!

Oh.

No, that's what it's like to have colonial mentality! Our way of life doesn't make us inferior. It's like he's been brainwashed! Many children are being sent to Alodia for European schooling, but what about our own teachings?

Hm. He did say that he didn't want to be pulled back down here. He is successful now. I guess that's how it is to be governor.

They hold importance too, of course.

He's more focused on being a good naturalized European than helping our community now. Does he even care anymore?

I want to believe he's just busy because of work. Though, you are right. He has not been home...
Ambaric Central Square:
The Europan Capital

Welcome to Earth...

Its beautiful blue oceans...

lush forests
...and beautiful night sky.

Welcome to PARADISE!

Mother, look at that!!

It's beautiful... so different from Europa.

We should go to Paradise.

We should go to Paradise.

In 2092, the Europans began to market the benefits of mass migration from Europa to Earth. A year later, we would see them arrive en masse to Earth Sector 001's newly crowned capital, Alodfa.
My father Nodin died in 2093: he was caught up in a dispute about water rations. He didn't live to see the European Magistrate sort out the water shortages in our sector. My mother always felt like he had died in vain—another casualty of the transition to the Neo Technological Age.
Emperor Arno's Palace

Amalric: General Agron, we need more bodies in the Work Camps. Those resources cannot mine themselves, as you know!

Emperor: General! Is the answer not obvious?! Make use of those beings in the Sectors on Earth. Especially the most vocally anti-European ones! Understand?

Understood, Emperor. It will be killing two birds with one stone.

Think, General! Is the answer not obvious?! Make use of those beings in the Sectors on Earth. Especially the most vocally anti-European ones! Understand?

Understood, Emperor. It will be killing two birds with one stone.

Mars: The Ayton Work Camp

These ones are sick, sir.

Then, you know what to do with them, right? Quickly!

Uh... Yes, sir!
You're my only child! I want you to know I love you, Ren!

Mal! Relax. It's just a youth protest. I'm not going to do anything silly. And Kamy will be there! Ka waabamin!

Let's do this! Yeah!

WHAT DO WE WANT?!

CHANGE!

SUFFERING!

Attention! You must all cease from protesting activities immediately! Attention! You must all cease from protesting activities immediately! The full weight of Europan law will be upon you!

Don't listen to them!

It's just another Europan scare tactic!

Eeee! This is lookin' bad, hey?

Maybe they'll just write us up citations like former governments used to...

Who knows?! It's not like there's a Beginner's Guide to Regime Change!
Attention! You must all cease from protesting activities immediately! The full weight of European law will be upon you!

I'm sure there's no reason to panic about this...

Ayton: A Mars Colony Work Camp

Hey! What's going on here?! Where's my friend?! Where's Kamy?!

Identification number?

How the?! I don't even know what that would be. I was one of the youth protesters in Alodia.

Ah yes... from the capital in Sector 001 on Earth. You do at least know the surname, correct?

Yes! It's Tansol!

She can't be!! I was just with her last night! You're lying!!

Strange. Unfortunately, she did not survive the transport. Deceased. There is nothing more.
Who... are you?

Usually I don't get to see you Earth types up close. Ha! Ha! You must be a bad one.

What?! Who are you?! I won't share a room with a Europen! GUARD!

I should say that! This is my cell!!

Don't bother. They won't give you a new cell. This place is over maximum capacity.

GUARD!

HAH! Have you looked around? This is a work camp on Mars.

Ah... and what do you mean by Earth types?

Wait... MARS... MARS COLONY?!

You're serving time at the Ayton Work Camp on Mars.

I can't be here...

Oh, but you are. Just like me. Since we're cellmates now, I'm Fyn.

...I'm Ren.

How long have I been here? My family must be worried.

You were sedated for the trip, then dropped into the cell. Just rest while you still can.
So began my prison days at the Ayton Work Camp with Fyn—she wasn't only a cellmate on Mars though. The European girl would become one of my greatest allies in the struggle against the empire. I wasn't going to dwell on the terrible things that had happened to my friend or that I had been unjustly ripped away from my family. Rather, I would devote myself to the future of my peoples.

It's been a while... Maybe four months...

Hm... Ren, what made you choose to fight against the Europian Empire?

I wasn't sure of what I was getting into, but seeing how they treated us in Alodian Square...my friend's death...It strengthened my resolve to resist. I want to go home to stop their colonialism. What about you?

My parents were leaders of a movement against the Emperor Arno. We're from a different religious branch of Europians. As old religion members, we can shift the minds of others. My parents were executed...

Most Europans share a loose thread of consciousness directed by Prophet Antigoni. He takes his orders from the Emperor...

I'm sorry for your loss, Fyn... But, how do you shift them?

But can't they think for themselves?

They can, but are kept under close watch and they are made to obey. The Emperor doesn't want anything that might upset the majority of Europians. My branch can shake the masses from the numbness, so most were taken here...

Hmmm...

Are you even listening to me?!!
It wasn't long before Fyn was released and I was 'alone' in that little red rock cell. Although, I wasn't really alone as Gazzhoo and Ashkoke were there by my side the entire time. I kept dreaming of a new future for my peoples. I anxiously awaited for my release day to come, so I could carry out our plan.
...Dissidents from Earth's Sector 001 have begun speaking out against the Europan government. They are claiming there has been a growing number of missing Earth beings. The Europan governors will be meeting with sectoral governors on Earth in attempts to negotiate peace...
I wasn't sure you could pull that all off...

Oh, Gazzhoo!
Everything starts out small, but little by little we can come together to achieve something. We need to dream of the possibilities for ourselves first, then work together.

Gotta go beyond that, Ren. You must finish what you started.

Hm.

Ha! Ha! I'm working on that part, Ashkode
Just trying to refine the signal, Ren! Don't look so nervous! I'm getting better at repairs.

No worries, Ogin.

I've been having trouble contacting you, Fyn. It would be nice to know...

...how things are coming along on your side.

Ah! Our transmitter has been jammed...for the past few...weeks. Hasn't been easy to find a decent Neo-Tech engineer here who is willing to work with...

...us. You know...that whole outlaw thing? I heard that a lot of people have gone missing in Alodia...

Well, I was working on getting material out to sway the public...

But, the number of people missing already is causing an outrage. Many people are calling on the Empire for answers...for justice.
These are answers that Emperor Arno and Prophet Antigon do not care to give—it would ruin them. Remember those who have been lost and let it give you...

...strength.

I've been working with other old religion branch members who have been released from work camps here.

It's not easy to find like-minded people, but these are the opportunities we need for our plans.
I've had some meetings with people leading movements in other Sectors.

Ah. There is some... in a loose alliance.

That's good. I like surprises! The government surely won't though!

And is there interest in alliances?

Breaking news! This just in...

Dissidents from numerous Sectors on Earth have begun to amass and rebel against the Europan Empire. If negotiations with Sectoral governors break down, General Agron and Admiral Adva will be bringing in the Empire's troops...
Look what I found in our food stores!

Let me go!!

Hm? We'll keep you!

No! You can't!

Wait... you can see him?

He's special, Ren!

Ha! Ha!

This lil' guy? Yeah! I am special!

Likely story!

What brings you here, then?

The name's Makons. I'm on my own. And I was hungry...

Great...

Okay then, Makons. Do you want to come with us back east?

Yeah! You'll see... I can help!

This should be something interesting!
CHAPTER 7 (2114): THE DARK SIDE OF EUROPA

General Agron...

We haven't been able to break him, sir.

I see. I will try my hand at it. Dismissed.

Why did you do it?

Who are your co-conspirators?

Tell me, now!!

HAHAHAHAHAAAAAA!!!

Don't you see how strange this situation is, dear General?

Answer my question. Or are you just going to torture me more then?

No. Do you understand the weight of your actions? You have murdered Prophet Antigon—the European who is second only to the Emperor himself.

I get that. If this were a small matter, then I wouldn't have been dragged back to Amalric.

How could you bring shame upon our family in this way?!!

We're all drones that serve the Empire, can't you see? I wanted to break free!!

Dissident rhetoric!!
Besides, you and I don't share the same branch name. You don't have to worry about this ruining your reputation...

You're still my brother, Andros.

If you feel this way, then I want you to make sure that Adros survives. Promise me this, Agron.

I suppose it is in my power to spare your son. However, he will have to move to the Mars Colony. You have my word, brother.

In 2114, Fyn called in a favour from one of her parent's friends—an old ally of the Jorga Branch. Her parents had taken care of him when his own family had cast him aside. As anticipated, the Prophet Antigon was replaced in his position by his impetuous and foolish son, Antigone. We were slowly, but surely breaking down the Empire.
CHAPTER II (2117): BATTLE OF THE TERRA BIODOMES

We organized a number of explosions to occur in the Europans' primary economic hot-zone—the Terra Biodomes. They were initially advanced as a revitalization project for people on Earth and were later promoted as destination vacations for Europans exclusively. These were simply covers for the sinister reality: several of our people working undercover found that the Terra Biodomes were strategic military compounds.

Alodia: Capital of Sector 001 on Earth

Have you made sure that the risk of casualties is minimal?

You think I wouldn't?!

Come on! This is important! Makons? Ashkode?

Yes, we made sure.

Go ahead, Ogin.

Synchronizing detonation, Ren.

Evacuation to Central Amalric! Evacuation to Central Amalric! We desperately need more ships sent to Alodia in Sector 001!
Dissidents from Earth's rebelling Sectors have negotiated to have autonomous zones put into place. A transfer of power from the European government to the Earth Sectoral governments has begun. European military outposts will be turned over and Sectoral governments will begin to govern them...

It will be a challenge for communications over the next few months, but I'll take advantage of the panic that is spreading.

For now, we'll have to lay low. I'd think that now is the perfect time for you to be out recruiting...
Not exactly perfect, but certainly an interesting time to do recruiting...

If Europan colonists ever had a test of their faith, then now would be the time.

At that moment, I wanted to keep looking forward to the strategic events that would come into play. I dreamed of the moment that we would truly have liberation.
In 2120, it seemed that splintering amongst our allies was bound to happen. However, we agreed that banding together was essential to toppling the regime we had experienced brutality under. Within two years Adros, the nephew of General Agron, had risen to become one of Fyn's greatest allies. With his knowledge of the inner workings of TERRA-02, our big operation began to take shape. For the next seven years, he and several other recruits were to work in the space station as engineers and pilots.
Lilsa and Kytt will be on ASTOR-059 disguised as delivery workers carrying cargo to the Mars Colony...

Right on schedule. Adros and Femke will meet them, then escort them here. We will train them to have the manerisms of naturalized Europans.

New identities for new people, huh? Ah... and I like Lilsa and Kytt...

I do too, but everyone has their part to play. They both understand how crucial they are to this operation. TERRA-02 isn't just a space station. It's used as a major communications hub and military station for the Empire.

Ah, Makons. How is the morale in the communities?

Everyone seems to be doing well --it's hard to live The Good Life, but it's something we all have to strive toward together.

Good. Coming together keeps us strong! Okay, you two! I'm on my way into town.

The elders respect you and feel that you bring us spiritual guidance.

What really helps me is their guidance. Living the Good Life will prepare us for the future.
This is where the Jorga Branch comes together. Welcome, Lilsa and Kytt!

This is definitely different from what we're used to...

...hey, Kytt?

It really is! It will be hard to act like we don't know anyone on TERRA-O2!

We have people working on the inside who have arranged for you and I to be a part of the flight training program, Lilsa. Kytt, you will be using your Neo-Tech engineering expertise to maintain TERRA-O2's system and its ships.

A couple of pilots and a couple of engineers... this should get interesting!

Seven years is a long time.
They will be staging riots at a number of Work Camps and towns as a distraction. Have you rigged the remote detonators for next week?

Yep, it's been completed. Kytt's been working with Femke on over-clocking the hyperdrives in the engine room.

Good. That will be enough to pull us into Mars' orbit.

Is everything on your end secured for Prophet Antigone's schedule to visit TERRA-02?

No, right on target. Admiral Adva has tightened his security, but much of it will be drawn away to deal with the riots on Mars.

Mars

One week later...
In 2129 Adros, Lilsa, Femke, and Kytt carried out our major operation. Using TERRA-02 as a weapon, its original Europan intent, they set it on a flight path to crash and explode into the Mars Colony's military bases and Europan Political Atrium. There were no survivors from those aboard TERRA-02.
Amalric: Emperor Arno's Palace

Have you found appropriate candidates to replace Prophet Antigone?

Yes, Emperor. I think he will be quite easy to replace.

Think?! You fool! The next one must be just as easy to control.

Emperor, in my opinion we could amass troops from conscripts all over the empire within a few months.

You were not appointed to have an opinion! The cost of a new war is far too expensive!

The economic losses in that wretched land have been too great! Everything has been compromised! RUINED!!
I heard your Uncle Dwaam decided to move to Europa as a naturalized citizen...

Yeah, he did. Sometimes you can't come back to the life you lived before.

There are a lot of changes to deal with. As the Empire crumbles away, you and I will have to create something new, Ren.

This is what we've been fighting for all these years. It's for the future generations. ...And for all of those we lost along the way.
It's been a little over a year since the last Europan ship left the land formerly known as Sector 001. This is our homeland as it has always been and as it shall always be. Although, we've been shaking off the way the Empire programmed us to think and are moving forward. Fyn's Jorga Branch remains on Mars--building a place that is their own while also working towards freeing the minds of other Europans.
Things have certainly changed.

You can say that again!

Change always happens.

I never thought I would see the end of it.

Ah yes.

It's not over. We must still nurture the land and our young ones. We must still keep our people healthy and thriving.

This is true.

This is our rebirth as a nation.