

Last of Our Kind

By Cody Daigle-Orians

RAEDA and NIA. A kinetic world around them. They talk directly to us, without regard for each other.

RAEDA

So the thing is, basically, we're a code.

The world fills with a sequence of letters: A, T, C, G, over and over, in a seemingly random order.

RAEDA (cont)

At a fundamental level, you can read human existence -
Well, more honestly, the existence of any living thing -
As a code.
A series of letters.

A. T. C. G.

Over and over again,
In what appears, to most eyes, a random progression.

But it's not random.
It's highly specific.
The order of those letters -

(and they're not *letters*, they're more,
They're nucleotides,
Adenine, Thymine, Cytosine, Guanine,
Chemical compounds that form the structure of DNA)

The order of those nucleotides
Determine the difference between

A tree and a rhinoceros,
An elephant and a bacteria,
You and pond scum.

And even in a more precise, nit-picky way,
The difference between

My brown eyes and your blue ones,
My female-ness and your male-ness,
All of the variety within the spectrum of living things.

RAEDA (cont.)

It's all about that code.

And the thing about codes:
If you break the code,
You can control it.

The code disappears.

NIA

The day they announced the Initiative
Wasn't the first time I saw her.

RAEDA

"Thank you for having me on, Cliff."

NIA

The first time I saw her was a few years before,
On some interview show.
Late at night.

RAEDA

"Yes, we're on the brink of some incredibly exciting things."

NIA

At the time, it just sounded like sci fi.

RAEDA

"So what we're able to do with this technology is, essentially, rewrite genetic code."

NIA

And she goes on to explain how they do that,
How it's not even invented technology,

RAEDA

"It's ancient. It's been in bacteria for ages."

NIA

How they harnessed it,
Refined it,
Made it usable.

RAEDA

“We simply made a piece of fundamental biology more elegant.”

NIA

And this.

This.

I didn't think anything of it at the time.
But now...

RAEDA

“Yes, Cliff. The implications here are far-reaching. I don't think we'll see this being used in humans on any large scale soon, because of the ethical dimensions, but I could see this technology used to solve ecological and human-adjacent issues. You know, we could use this technology to introduce genes that would slowly kill off malaria-carrying mosquitos or particularly invasive species of weeds. We can do that. And I can see us moving in that direction sooner than later.”

NIA

When they announced the Initiative,
There she was again,
A talking head in all of the news stories,

A clip from that interview:

RAEDA

“You know, we could use this technology to introduce genes that would slowly kill of malaria-carrying mosquitos or particularly invasive species of weeds. We can do that. And I can see us moving in that direction sooner than later.”

NIA

It didn't feel like sci fi this time.

RAEDA

I had nothing at all to do with the Initiative.
Nothing.

I wasn't working for any government agency.
I wasn't even working in a government-funded lab.

I wanted nothing to do with the government
After the Consolidation. *Nothing.*

RAEDA (cont.)

I was teaching at a private school in New Hampshire.

The Initiative had nothing to do with me.

I thought what was going on globally was insane,
Just like everyone else,

I mean, the embrace of authoritarianism was disturbing
and it had been disturbing for years,
Since Brexit. Since Trump.
And I'd been screaming about it, too.
I went to the rallies. I went to the marches.

But there was a belief, I guess, that this was temporary,
That this... *insanity* was just the swing of the pendulum,
And it would swing back, and we'd be fine.

But the Consolidation...

NIA

I was not surprised by this.

RAEDA

The leaders of the major world governments.

NIA

No one I know was surprised by this.

RAEDA

Governments, at this point, run by
Authoritarian administrations.

NIA

White people.

RAEDA

A decision made in the best interest of the global community.

NIA

See? White people.

RAEDA

To consolidate power into one global governing entity.

NIA

One world government!

And liberal white people lost their minds,
And they planned marches, and they held rallies,
And they made signs.

They made a lot of signs.

But they'd been sleeping too long
On the slow creep of the power grab.
They could win elections and still not win seats in government.
Not just in the U.S.

Everywhere.

RAEDA

It was an incredibly frustrating time.

NIA

And look -- before all this happened,
I wasn't an activist. I wasn't a protester.

I was a third grade teacher.
I had two kids of my own.
I was living a very comfortable life.

Aware. Don't get me wrong.
I wasn't sitting around pretending
That I was immune from the societal and structural...

You know, I *knew* it was about race,
Or it was going to be about race
Because it was *always* about race,
Everything,
And I wasn't blind to that.
And I tried to make my students aware of it
(in the way you can make third graders aware of institutional racism)
And I tried to make my kids aware of it.
And I was *present*. Living in it.

NIA (cont.)

But I wasn't...

In the streets.
In the movement.

Because...
They always *need* someone to hate.
Right?

It's just like third grade:
A bully isn't a bully unless they have *someone* to bully.

These bullies --
These authoritarian assholes with nice suits
And crisp haircuts
And white faces --

They needed black faces
And brown faces
And yellow faces

To point to and say,
"This is what we are not."

That's the short of bullshit
That holds up their hate.

So I was *aware*.
Alert.
But not scared.

Until...

RAEDA

The Initiative was announced on a Monday.

NIA

The Council of the Consolidated World Government
All lined up in their best suits.

RAEDA

I was explaining to a classroom of tenth graders
The basics of genetics.

NIA

Our President steps up to the podium.

RAEDA

My phone buzzes a few times in my desk.
Text messages.
Everyone knows I'm in class at this time.

NIA

"... the preservation of global peace is of the highest priority..."

RAEDA

More buzzes.
More texts.

NIA

"... not all paths we've taken as a global race has served us well..."

RAEDA

I get my students working on an independent writing assignment.
What's going on?

NIA

"... must utilize all of our known technologies to address the paths that have not been fruitful..."

RAEDA

40 Texts.
40.

NIA

"... thanks to scientists like genetic researcher Raeda Griffin..."

RAEDA

My husband's texted me last.
"The President just said your name."

NIA

"... launching an ambitious and likely controversial initiative that will alter the course of human history..."

RAEDA

Why?
Why has the President said my name?
What's going on?

NIA

"... through the use of cutting edge technology in the field of genetic modification, we will phase out-

That's what he said. Exactly. Those were the words.

"... we will phase out non-Caucasian ethnicities from the human genome."

RAEDA

Oh my God.

NIA

And then,
This is how she came to be the focus for me.
They played a clip from the interview I'd seen
Late night
Few years before.

RAEDA

"You know, we could use this technology to introduce genes that would slowly kill of malaria-carrying mosquitos or particularly invasive species of weeds. We can do that. And I can see us moving in that direction sooner than later."

NIA

The bullies got tired of being bullies.

RAEDA

"... phase out non-Caucasian ethnicities from the human genome..."

NIA

They didn't need us.
So they'd just get rid of us.

RAEDA

I don't want to talk about the mess that followed
The *circus* --

RAEDA (cont.)

It took fifteen minutes from the announcement of the Initiative
For a nest of reporters to crop up on our school campus.

And that was just the beginning.
I didn't work for the government.
My research was over ten years old.
The clip they showed on all the news channels --

NIA

"We can do that. And I can see us moving in that direction sooner than later."

RAEDA

I was transitioning out of research at that point,
I was just the best public face,
I could explain it and be charming
I wasn't...

But once it's out
And you're everywhere,
There's nothing you can do.

NIA

They tried to *spin* this shit, too.

"We're not killing *you*.
We're just editing your genes
So that you can't reproduce,

We're killing your *children*.
We're killing your *next generation*.
We're killing *your future*."

And that was supposed to make it okay.
We were supposed to, I don't know,
Just say,
"Oh, well if you put it *that way*, sure thing!"
Like...

RAEDA

The terrifying part of technology is its precision.

NIA

There were clinics in every city.

RAEDA

At some point, if you refine it enough,
The most complicated technology
Is elegantly precise.

NIA

They were dedicated clinics for “genetic modification.”

RAEDA

When the technology was discovered, it was cumbersome
And complex
And prohibitively expensive.

NIA

Sections of the police force and segments of the military
Were re-assigned to gather up non-Caucasian ethnicities.

RAEDA

By the time the Initiative was launched,
Which is maybe 15, 18 years,
Editing the genome of a human being was as simple
As a booster shot.

NIA

If you were black, officers came to your house.

RAEDA

Science does not harm people.

NIA

If you were brown, officers came to your house.

RAEDA

Science is impersonal.

NIA

If you were red
If you were yellow
If you even *looked* non-white...

RAEDA

Science and knowledge
And *progress*...

These things aren't partisan.

NIA

The officer that knocked on my door was maybe 22.
Young little white boy.
Nervous face. Trying to puff up for me.

"Is this the residence of Nia Woods, Jelani Woods, Esther Woods, Angela Woods, and Lamar Woods?"

"Yes."

"Here are the summons for your appointments."

And he handed me five envelopes:
One for me, one for my husband,
One for each of my three children,
My youngest, Lamar, was 2.

I took them.

"Failure to appear at your appointed time, Mrs. Woods, will result in arrest, imprisonment and forced modification. It's in your best interest to simply show up on time."

My best interest.
It is in my best interest.

I closed the door without saying a word.

RAEDA

The world exploded.

NIA

I sat down at my computer.

RAEDA

Riots everywhere. Across the globe.

NIA

“Dr. Raeda Griffin.”

RAEDA

Every time you turned on the TV, there were overturned cars
And burning buildings,
And streets covered in debris and bodies and blood.

NIA

She taught at a private school about three hours from where we lived.

RAEDA

Everywhere.
The entire world erupted.
It... was shocking.

NIA

I had four days before our family’s scheduled appointment.

RAEDA

But people still *went*.
They still showed up when they were told to.
Which -- honestly that shocked me more than anything,
That people would willingly participate in something
So obviously and unequivocally *abhorrent*.
And not the just the people of color
But the *doctors*. The *nurses*.
The people who ran these clinics,
Who set the appointments,

They just showed up, like it was just another day at the office,
Erasing people.

I couldn’t --

NIA

I told Jelani I’d be taking a day trip to see a friend of mine from college.

RAEDA

I couldn’t understand.

NIA

I got in my car.
And headed to Dr. Raeda Griffin.

RAEDA

There's this coffee shop down the street from our school.
I usually go there right after classes are over.
Get a coffee. Organize my brain a little.
Think through the next day before I head home.

I like being fully present for my family at the end of the day.

So I'm there, having a coffee,
And this woman is there.
Black woman. I don't recognize her.

And, you know, if I'm going to be honest here,
The town we live is very white, so a woman of color
I don't recognize is... a surprise.

She's having a coffee, too.
And we make eye contact a few times.
Actually, every time I look over to where's she's sitting,
She's looking back at me.
Watching me.

And I get it. My face has been everywhere.
I'm that woman on the news.
The science woman. The Explainer.
And I get blistering looks all the time.
But this...

This is a different look.

NIA

She looked better on TV.
More put together.
This woman. Having a coffee.
She looks... a mess.
Overwhelmed.

I feel momentarily bad for what's about to happen.

RAEDA

She's looking at me like...
Like she pities me.

NIA

I have no feeling for her whatsoever.

RAEDA

She stands --

NIA

I stand --

RAEDA

And in a quick movement, she throws over the table she's been sitting at
And the whole cafe is a collective chaos

NIA

Confusion all around.
I move quickly to her.

RAEDA

She's over to my table in a flash.

NIA

"I will not be the last of our kind."

RAEDA

"I will not be the last of our kind."
And she takes out a pocketknife.

NIA

It's Jelani's.

RAEDA

She slashes a cut on her palm.
She's bleeding.

Nia raises a hand, palm out. It's bleeding.

NIA

I grab her arm,
Twist her hand palm-up
And slice a cut into hers.

Raeda raises a hand, palm out. It's bleeding.

RAEDA

And she presses her bleeding hand
Into my bleeding hand
So our blood, together...
She squeezes.

NIA

"You will carry us, because you owe us."

RAEDA

And she goes.

A long silence.

RAEDA (cont.)

There are things we do because we have to.
There are things we do because we can.

I pressed her blood into the cut on my palm again
Before I let the barista wrap it in a towel.

Raeda walks away.

NIA

It doesn't matter what happened to me, does it?
In one generation... we'll be gone.

Nia, alone. Hand bleeding.

END OF PLAY.

