WRITING OUTSIDE LIVED EXPERIENCE ON THE WAY TO ANOTHER WORLD

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Writing Outside Lived Experience
An important aspect of any author’s range

The Challenge
Starting from best genuine intentions...
...an author can yet come across as uninformed, insensitive, even offensive

The Mitigation
Reach out to the culture you wish to write about...
...interact, learn, visit
...if possible, enroll readers native to the culture to critique

The Goal
Write an empathic and inclusive novel for young readers
Endow characters with authentic voices...
...so that general readers gain perspective of the portrayed culture
The Goal Restated
Create a young-adult adventure novel for David Brin’s OUT OF TIME series, conveying diversity, cross-cultural empathy and expanded horizons

The Starting Point
- Native American traditional understanding of ecology
- The Trail of Tears tragedy of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek (Muskogee) and Seminole tribes

An Unexpected Connection
- 1840s - Choctaw Nation learned of the Irish Potato Famine and sent a monetary gift during their own struggle and suffering
- 2015 - Their act of kindness was commemorated by the Irish Nation; the connection continues to be celebrated annually

Getting it Right
- I reached out to Choctaw Nation Cultural Services and described my project

A positive response led to my visit...
A VISIT TO CHOCTAW NATION
DURANT AND TUSKAHOMA, OK
JUNE 2022
HOST

Dr. Ian Thompson
Senior Director, Historic Preservation Department, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
PhD, Archaeology (University of New Mexico)
Tribal Archaeologist
Certified Choctaw Community Language Instructor
HOST

Megan Baker
Research Associate, Historic Preservation Department, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
PhD Candidate, Anthropology (UCLA)
Cultural Center

- A beautiful modern facility, less than a year old
- Offers a powerful story of a people’s tragedy and resilience
- Depicts and celebrates how Choctaw Nation is thriving today
- Immersive and interactive exhibits, artifacts, and more
In Choctaw matrilineal culture, women traditionally hold positions of respect, esteem and power, and are seen as life-giving.

Land is identified with women, and held communally.

The American / European practice of requiring men to hold title to land, parceled as single-family plots, proved disruptive for the Choctaw community and culture.
Native American Codetalkers contributed to US military success by communicating tactical messages in their own language.

The role of the Navajo in the WWII Pacific Theater is well known. But earlier, in WWI, Choctaw Codetalkers contributed similarly to success in the European trenches.

Tragically, Choctaw language and culture were routinely suppressed in the boarding schools.
Can you parse the translation?
The Choctaw were force-marched from their historical homeland in the Mississippi Valley. Today, in southeastern Oklahoma, they are sovereigns of a hilly, watered, forested land. Not the prairie of popular conception, although that ecosystem is adjacent.
Working with the Land

- The Indigenous view holds that entities within an ecosystem practice reciprocal gifting
- Traditional fire management practices renew the land
- Humans are seen as latecomers on Earth, with much to learn from beings with deeper history
- Tribal Nations continue to play a vital role in caretaking, listening to, and praising the land
Putting It Together
Melding Indigenous and Western Science Worldviews

RAISING THE ROOF
A Proposed OUT OF TIME Novel in David Brin’s YA Series *

Talulah (Tullie), a 15-year-old from Choctaw Nation, cares deeply for the natural world, and has feelings of anger over injustices to her people and the land. She receives an improbable invitation from the 24th century.

She is tasked with leading a group of youths to survey a distant exoplanet, an ice-roofed ocean world. Tullie’s teammates come from the present, past and future, and include a quirky robot and a terrestrial octopus.

Tullie and team learn of plans to exploit the rich ecosystem they find, placing alien cephalopods and more at risk. They must find a way to avert ecological disaster and aid the native inhabitants of this amazing world.

* One of two in development by TechLit authors; ahead in the queue is THE GHOSTS OF GIBBS-19, by Rachael Kuintzle and Samuel Clamons
An Exoplanet Ecosystem
Through an Indigenous Lens

“Yes,” resumed Tullie. “…There is harmony among the native species…
Each has a role to play, within a web of relationships. Signals from the
environment activate behaviors. They take turns. Some give while some
take.”

“Tullie, would you say the native cephalopods are stewards of the
planetary ecosystem?”

“I would. Because, like good stewards, they listen. They are aware when
their world is out of balance. We cannot know if they regard other life, or
natural phenomena, as having personhood. But we can observe their
behavior and try to infer their posture toward other ecosystem elements.
During the short time we were with them, we heard them lament, speaking
from the long view…”
QUESTIONS?
Many Indigenous peoples have variants of ball-based sports

The Choctaw call their ball game Stickball
- Two sticks – one for catching, the other for throwing, the ball carried between
- Dexterity in stick manipulation is eye-popping

The expert player who explained the game waxed eloquent about the need for unity of perception, mind and body
The Trail of Tears

- Interactions between the Choctaw Nation and Europeans, and later the Americans, were fraught with distrust, lies, dishonor, and broken treaties.
- Although the Trail of Tears may be most visible, numerous injustices occurred during the decades before and after.
- A long pattern of bait-and-switch, fraud, swindling, plying with alcohol, and power-based threats of war, resulting in death, disruption, and oppression.
- A posture of forgiveness by some Choctaw may have played a part in the tribe’s resilience, and in reinforcing the moral core of their culture.
Choctaw Nation
Government Services

- For Choctaw Nation citizens
  - Health Services
  - Hospital
  - Food Bank
  - Community Center
  - More…
CHIEF GARY BATTON and ASSISTANT CHIEF JACK AUSTIN, JR.
TRIBAL ELDER

GAYLIA GREEN

“POKNI”