

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...



Kindred Spirits

Midleton, County Cork, Ireland



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

WOMEN HELD POSITIONS OF RESPECT, ESTEEM, AND POWER
IN TRADITIONAL CHOCTAW SOCIETY



Women held positions of respect, esteem, and power in traditional Choctaw society. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Choctaw words *hullo*, *hoy*, *ihullo*, to love, *hollabill*, respect, *hollitapa*, beloved, and *hollitabillshki* to honor. All of which originate from the Choctaw word for the female essence.

In traditional thought, the earth was viewed as being female. *Nunih Walya*, the place of Choctaw creation was referred to as *Hullitopa Ishki*, beloved Mother. Ancient stories tell of *Ohoyo Osh Chishba*, Unknown Woman, a spiritual being who first brought corn to the Choctaw people. At the time of first sustained contact with Europe, Choctaw women were widely recognized as the best farmers in the Southeast. They managed the agricultural fields that provided the foundation of their community's diet. The Choctaw calendar honors *Tek Ihvshi*, Women's Month, corresponding to the start of the agricultural season.

The responsibilities of Choctaw women also extended to accompanying diplomatic missions and participating in ceremonies. In some ceremonies, women adopted individuals from other groups into their own clan to make them family. Some women served as doctors, and occasionally as interim chiefs. Some Choctaw wives could even be seen supporting their husbands in battle. For this reason, the Choctaw war dance involves both women and men.

Choctaw Women

- 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

Codetalkers

- 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

CHOCTAW CODETALKERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

On October 23, 2008, the President of the United States signed the
Codetalkers Recognition Act. The Act awards congressional medals to
Native American Codetalkers. Choctaw, along with messengers from
several other tribes, served in WWI and used their native language to
relay messages for the military.

In April of the following year, the State of Oklahoma officially recognized
the Choctaw Codetalkers as well. Chief Gregory L. Pyle and Assistant
Chief Robert Ernest recognized leaders in the House of Representatives
unanimously approved the legislation recognizing the efforts, valor and
dedication of the Choctaw Codetalkers. Later the same month
recognized the Codetalkers in Oklahoma and American Civil War on
the U.S. Air Force Medal of Honor for Codetalkers in the summer
of 2010.

Forrester T. Baker
Albert Billy
Schlicht Billy
Mitchell Bobb
Victor Brown
Ben Carterby
Benjamin Franklin Colbert
George Edwin Davenport
Joseph Harvey Davenport
James (Jimpson M.) Edwards
Tobias W. Frazier
Benjamin Wilburn Hampton





Language

- Can you parse the translation?



The Land

- 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

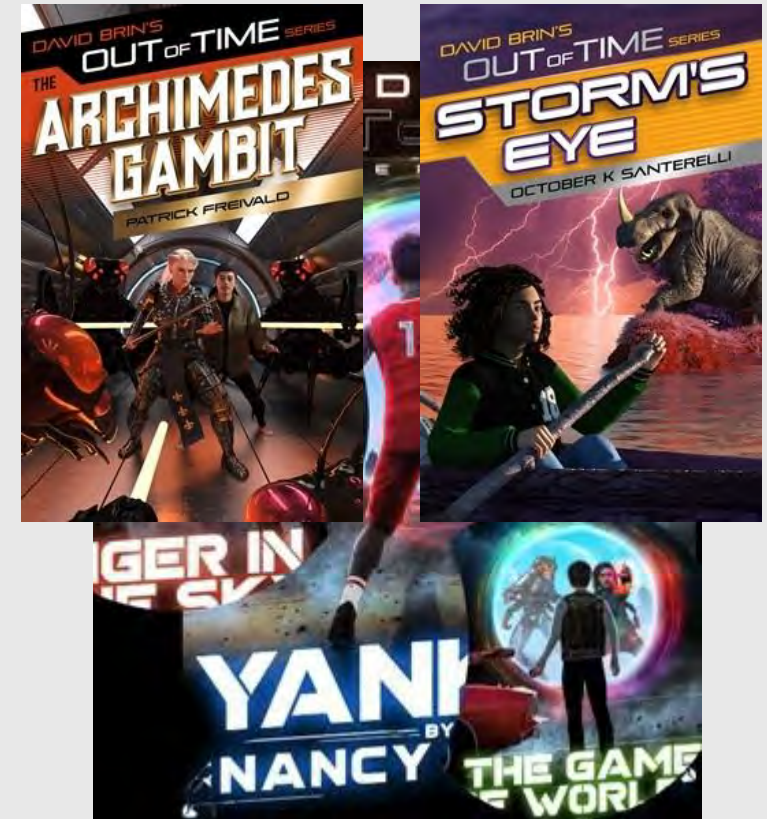
*A Proposed **OUT OF TIME** Novel in David Brin's YA Series **

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



*Only teens can teleport through time and space!
Dollops of fun, adventure and optimism for young adults.*

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...”



Isjavarheimur
A remote ice-and-ocean world

Illustration Credit: Ryan Doyle



CHOCTAW NATION
FAITH | FAMILY | CULTURE

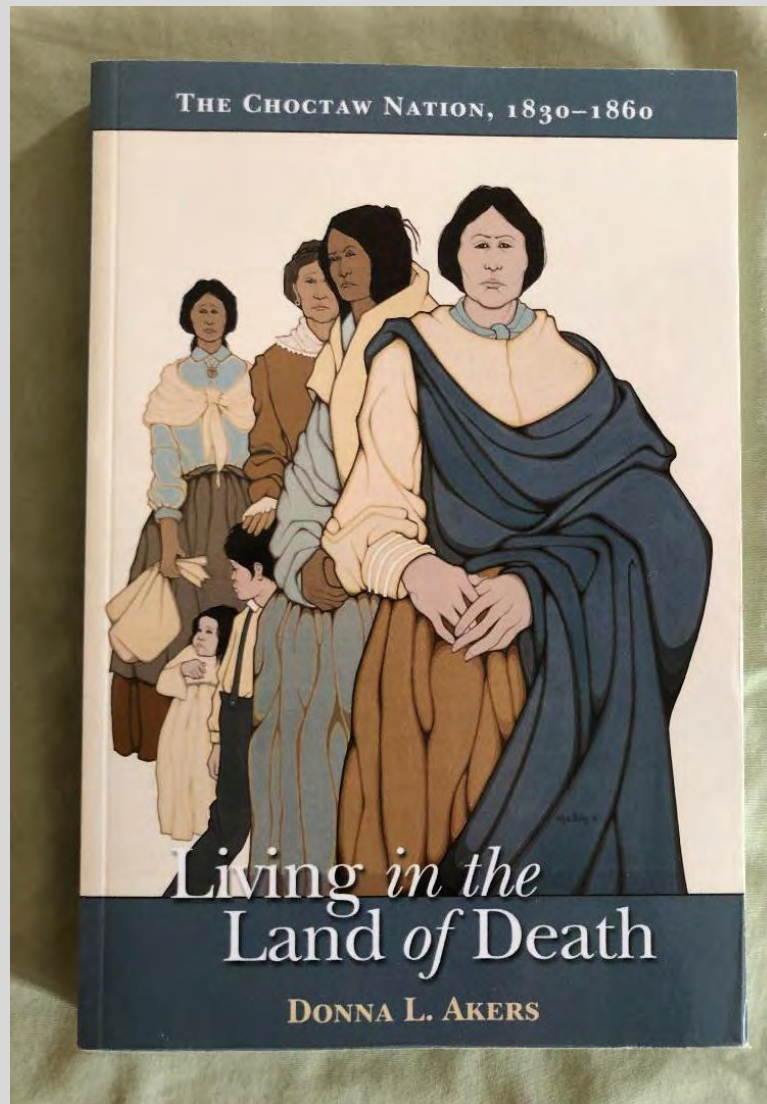


QUESTIONS?



Stickball

- 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"

