



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# RoboKin and Technovation in Cherokee Speculative Fiction

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Included in the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) collections is America Meredith's (Cherokee Nation) portrait of Mary Golda Ross (fig. 1). Ross was an esteemed aerospace engineer who was instrumental in designing concepts for the U.S. missile program and interplanetary travel. In Meredith's painting, Ross stands on the left side of the image, gesturing towards the Agena rocket she helped develop. A seven-pointed Cherokee star is affixed to the sky above her, and across a landscape below sits a version of her name in Cherokee: ᎠᎵᎾ ᎠᎳᎠ ᎠᎳᎠ ᎠᎳᎠ.<sup>1</sup>

In the painting, Ross looks as if we have encountered her mid-lecture, perhaps referencing the years before she joined Lockheed when she was working with youth in Cherokee Nation.



America Meredith (Cherokee Nation), *Ad Astra per Astra*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (26/8630). Reprinted with the artist's permission.



I open with this painting for several reasons. First, it serves as a reminder that innovation and technology are critical components of Cherokeeness. Second, it disrupts colonial stereotypes that not only mark the Indigenous person as a primitive remnant of the past—out of place and out of time—but also the false logic that innovation is only made possible through Enlightenment notions of critical inquiry and Western science that are grounded in a secular Judeo-Christian world view (Wynter and McKittrick 13-18). Throughout her lifetime, Ross vocally and unequivocally attributed her accomplishments as the first woman and the first Native person to work as an aerospace engineer to her upbringing and education in Cherokee Nation (Viola). The painting's title, *Ad Astra per Astra*, which translates as "to the stars through the stars" is a riff on "per aspera ad astra," meaning "through hardship to the stars". Collectively, the title and the imagery in Meredith's painting signal the contrast between U.S. settler and Cherokee cosmologies and situates Ross and her accomplishments in a Cherokee world. Instead of framing the stars as a destination, something to be conquered, Meredith's title emphasizes a sense of consensual knowing and interrelatedness. Her painting symbolically gestures towards the Cherokee story of how the Pleiades formed and those stars' relationship to the pine tree.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, she situates Ross in an interconnected world, in which the stars in the sky and the pine trees that run along a river shore may be physically distant but share an intimate and interdependent history that continues to be carried through story. For, as Joseph Pierce (Cherokee Nation)

beautifully reminds us, "[o]ur bodies are not symbolically made of stars. We are those cosmic elements, and in recognizing ourselves as cosmologically interrelated, as connecting cross-temporally as part of an emergent and ongoing cosmological order, we maintain the bonds of reciprocity and collaboration that are at the heart of our stories" (97).

By positioning Ross mid-conversation—or perhaps mid-lecture—we can read her as a teacher, instructing us in how Cherokee cosmologies and interstellar travel are intertwined. Her human figure does not occupy the center of the painting but instead stands to the side while gesturing to the greater cosmos and the other-than-human relationships she dedicated her life to pursuing. Ross is not sanctified but rather celebrated as an important member of an expansive human and other-than-human Cherokee world. Meredith's portrait of Ross honors her not through exceptionalism but through her imbrication in systems of recognition, respect, and responsibility that include the human, more than human, and the cosmos, what Pierce terms "kinstillation," a neologism of kin and constellation that "think[s] along with" Cree scholar Karyn Recollet, who first proposed the term (96). For Pierce, "kinstillations enact our ancestral knowledge, of the stars, of our own stories of creation and of survival, in an ongoing, reflexive relationality that is nonhierarchical and ephemeral (as in everyday, quotidian)" (96).



As Danika Medak-Saltzman (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) rightly points out, it is no coincidence that a surge in Indigenous futurist and speculative art has emerged at the same moment as large-scale Indigenous grassroots political movements (144). Relatedly, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) argues that for Indigenous writers of speculative fiction, fantasy “offers greater scope for addressing issues of decolonization and self-determination than realist fiction” (*Why*, 148). He rightly cautions that fantasy and speculative genres have long and troubled histories of reproducing anti-Indigenous stereotypes, especially in the United States and Canada. However, as the groundswell of Indigenous speculative fiction published in the twenty-first century demonstrates, Indigenous writers are repurposing genre writing to interrogate settler colonial violence and engage in decolonial futurist praxes.<sup>3</sup> In a moment of inarguable climate change, social turmoil, and resurgent Indigenous activism, there has been a turn to the speculative to make sense of the current moment and grapple with how to better care for the world on behalf of our human and other-than-human relatives of the future. Much like Meredith’s painting, Indigenous literary/artistic experimentation with the speculative does not query innovation as something entirely new but rather as contributing to longstanding praxes informed by cosmologies and tactics of survivance used by Indigenous peoples following the apocalyptic colonization of Turtle Island and the new world order instantiated by capitalism, chattel enslavement, and colonization.

For the rest of this essay, I turn to Cherokee Nation writers Blake Hausman and Daniel H. Wilson, speculative novelists that interrogate dogmatic beliefs in technology as social progress. Hausman's *Riding the Trail of Tears* and Daniel Wilson's *Robopocalypse*—were both published in 2011 (Wilson's sequel to *Robopocalypse* was published three years later in 2014). Hausman imagines a VR experience where customers virtually re-enact the Trail of Tears and Wilson details a global robot takeover staged in a dystopic future. I argue that the novels' commentary on artificial intelligence, technology, and grounded knowledge build on a long history of Cherokee technological innovation, what I term *Cherokee technovation*. By Cherokee technovation, I mean Cherokee peoples' ability to take technological innovations not necessarily created to support Indigenous self-determination—and, in fact, often developed to enhance the extractive-capitalist ethos that undergirds settler futurity and Indigenous dispossession—and creatively repurpose and adapt them in modes that are grounded in Cherokee ways of being and which nurture Cherokee lifeways and worldviews.

Mechanical technology, a preoccupation of both Hausman's and Wilson's novels, has been a critical resource for Cherokee people for centuries and is encoded in some Cherokee understandings of peoplehood. The printed form of the Cherokee syllabary was itself a monumental technovation, as was the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first



Native newspaper printed by a Native nation on Turtle Island. Contemporary Cherokee computer programmers, developers, and filmmakers are building on this legacy through their use of facial recognition software, animation, and other forms of virtual storytelling to narrate Cherokeeness and assert Cherokee survivance.<sup>4</sup> Collectively, all of these narratives insist that Cherokees and non-Cherokees alike think about ethical relationships to technology grounded in Cherokee notions of responsibility and community that do not view technology as a cultural salve or savior but rather as part of an already interrelated ecosystem, a kinstillation of sorts. Contributing to this long tradition, Hausman and Wilson interrogate twenty-first-century fetishization of the emancipatory power of technology using longstanding Cherokee discourses that demand a more nuanced and careful approach than dominant modes of inquiry.

### **Rematriation through Virtual and Embodied Healing**

In *Riding the Trail of Tears*, Hausman farcically interrogates the relationship between Cherokeeness, mechanization, and embodiment. The novel traces the mishaps that occur when a virtual reality simulation of the Trail of Tears is disrupted by Nunnehi, computer-generated Little People who take over the ride's mainframe in their attempt to escape the machine. The Tsalagi Removal Exodus Point Park (TREPP) is a theme park created north of Atlanta that invites guests to walk the Trail of Tears virtually. Guests are fastened into "chairsuits" where "Realskyn" "shrinks or stretches to

wrap itself around the tourist like a wetsuit" (*Riding*, 74). Then begins a fully immersive ride where guests participate in the Trail of Tears as simulated Cherokee people. The TREPP offers riders the opportunity to virtually "go Native" and experience the horror of forced Removal, a settler technology with profoundly devastating ramifications for Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup> They attempt to evade death or starvation and make it all the way to Indian Territory. TREPP's monetization of Removal capitalizes on Cherokee loss, both literally and figuratively, and allows riders to imagine they know what that experience was like. By inhabiting it, riders gain a sense of ownership over it.

As a person of both Cherokee Nation and Eastern Band descent, the novel's protagonist, Tallulah Wilson, represents the futility of Removal. Despite its genocidal underpinnings, her kin who survived forced Removal and those who hid and stayed in Appalachia *all* endured. Nonetheless, her work for TREPP has disconnected Tallulah from her sense of self; she has become numb to the trauma the ride simulates. As the narrator explains to us near the novel's beginning, "I don't know how anything so organic expects to handle a digital universe in such doses" (15). Most scholarship on the novel emphasizes the ride's mechanics or Hausman's commentary on the Trail of Tears and Cherokee history. While I begin with a brief analysis of the ride, my main focus is on Tallulah's healing journey. Specifically, how her ability to make kin with the virtual world allows her to heal from historical and familial trauma in ways that return her to herself.<sup>6</sup>



I read Tallulah’s story in conversation with a growing body of Indigenous studies scholarship that seeks to make sense of current technological innovations through Indigenous epistemologies, kinship structures, and understandings of reciprocity. Doing so allows us to move away from simplistic rubrics of good or bad, living or non-living, historical or contemporary and understand Hausman’s novel as prioritizing Cherokee cosmologies that instead engage with the world through a sense of balance and interconnection – Pierce’s notion of kinstillation. Relatedly, I argue that Hausman utilizes what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) terms “shared code” in his novel, an intentional use of Indigenous aesthetics that speaks specifically to Indigenous readers (*As We Have*, 200). When we prioritize the Cherokee reader of Hausman’s novel, or read the novel through a Cherokee lens, we witness its advocacy for a recuperative matrilineality that insists that Cherokee women are not only powerful but that their health and well-being are critical to Cherokee futurity. As part of the novel’s emphasis on women, there is a potent subtext that emphasizes the dynamism of embodied Cherokee experiences that are about pleasure, joy, and laughter rather than trauma and loss. It is critical to note that while the TREPP serves as a virtual Removal, Tallulah’s presence on the ride is paradoxically also a reminder that the project of Removal in Georgia—to eradicate Indigenous peoples from their homelands—was not successful.

### **Ghost in the Jeep**

The TREPP's owners hired Tallulah as a cultural consultant for the ride because her grandfather invented the ride's prototype. Grandpa Art used an adapted Jeep Grand Cherokee and television screens that clicked on to the windows to develop "Surround Vision," the TREPP's bedrock technology (*Riding*, 33). When she was twelve years old, Grandpa Art invited Tallulah to join him in the Jeep as they virtually rode the Trail of Tears together from his garage in Asheville, North Carolina all the way to Indian Territory. Tallulah describes the experience as an unsettling one, not only because they relived one of the most significant collective traumas Cherokee people have endured, but because she felt a sense of uncanniness about the Cherokees she witnessed along the trail: "[G]randpa said that the Indians walking the Trail were digital and couldn't see inside the car, but Tallulah thought they stared right through her" (33). This passage is the first instance of many where distinctions between a virtual world and a human world are porous, where Cherokee cosmologies and people from the Cherokee world disrupt or circumvent human intentions for technology. Instead of a totalizing control or mastery of the TREPP—a logic that operates under colonizing and extractive logics, the ghosts in the machine, if you will—have other plans for the ride and its participants.

Before I discuss these "ghosts in the machine" (or the novel's ghostly machinery) any further, I want to linger on the significance of the Jeep Cherokee because it



warrants some unpacking. Grandpa Art's use of the vehicle for his prototype is poignant. He repurposes an iconic symbol of settler appropriation to develop technology that enables him to feel a sense of proximity to his Cherokee ancestors or "go to the source," as he says. His repurposing of the Jeep is itself a quintessential form of Cherokee technovation (33).<sup>7</sup> While this model is not the only one to don the name of an Indigenous people or Indigenous person, it is arguably *the* most enduring example.<sup>8</sup> Jeep began using the name in 1974 and then ceased doing so in 2002, but revived it in 2013 without consulting any leaders of the three federally-recognized Cherokee nations (White). Despite Jeep's claims that the name is intended to honor Cherokee people, law professor Stacy Leeds (Cherokee Nation) asked, "What images are they hoping will pop up?" . . . "Are they trying to project the untamed? Are they trying to project the frontier?" (Gross). In 2021, Chuck Hoskin Jr., Principal Chief of Cherokee Nation, went on record to criticize Jeep's use of the Nation's name. Hausman's novel lambasts Jeep's appropriative use of the name to describe its most popular line of vehicles. After Tallulah rides in her grandfather's invention, every time she sees a Jeep Cherokee on the road, she wonders "if the person behind the wheel was trying to ride the Trail of Tears" (*Riding*, 33). As she scans the many vehicles she sees on the busy commuter roads of Atlanta, "[S]he figured there were at least ten, if not twenty, Jeep Cherokees with Georgia license plates for every Cherokee person who died on the Trail of Tears. And that was just Georgia" (34). Tallulah's mathematical

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reflection highlights the profound discord of being a Cherokee person in Georgia, where Cherokee vehicles have seemingly replaced Cherokee people. It is a cruel reminder of the violence of Removal. The Jeep, a symbol of rugged adventuring, mocks the forced movement of structural violence and invites its owners not to ride the Trail of Tears, as Tallulah imagines, but to ride *because* of the Trail of Tears. In other words, what makes a long-distance road trip possible, and the notion of "exploring the wilderness," is a sustained project of displacement, warfare, and disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island.

We learn that Art's technology was monetized because the Museum of the Cherokee Indian inherited his intellectual property rights upon his death and sold them to the "Atlanta moneyman Jim Campbell" who then created the TREPP (34). While Art's invention can bring a rider closer to the experience of Removal, Art's personal life has disrupted the flows of movement Removal was meant to entrench: that Cherokees only go west. Art is from Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma but lives with his Eastern Band Cherokee wife Lee in Ashville, part of the Cherokee pre-Removal homelands. Art and Lee's union, as Cherokee individuals of two distinct Cherokee nations, represents a re-union of Cherokee people across the cleaving divide of Removal. However, we also learn that Tallulah's father, Art's son, died in a car crash, another painful association between cars and loss that Tallulah carries with her. It was her father's estrangement from Art that led to Tallulah's lack of awareness of her Cherokee lineage, a legacy she



only rekindled after her father's passing. For Tallulah, information gets lost or hidden through her paternal family lines. Therefore, Art's Jeep Cherokee, despite its tangled web of corporate, technological, and familial signifiers, serves as an essential touchstone for Tallulah's personal history and sense of Cherokeeeness.

In its finessed TREPP form, the ride operates on a causality loop that works like a choose-your-own-adventure novel. There are a finite number of ways the story can play out, but riders' decisions influence the experiences they collectively share. We learn that inhabiting the ride are the "real" Nunnehi, or Little People (as is our narrator, the "Nunnerator," who lives in Tallulah's head). They refer to themselves as Misfits, creatures in the machine that no human is aware of who await the prophetic moment when someone will emancipate them. According to the prophecy, a girl will return and free them with a great rush of water (192-3). Importantly, the Misfits understand themselves as having a deep digital past that defies colonial conventions of time and technology. When the stories changed, Cherokee people forgot about them until they appeared again in Art's machine, which the Nunnerator describes as "my homeland" (6). He *also* explains that "I'm probably more indigenous than you, and the digital earth is where I'm indigenous. I'm more Nunnehi than you probably thought Nunnehi could be, but I never took such a formal shape until they built their ride" (13). The Nunnerator describes the TREPP's invention in the plural, creating a collective. Moreover, his

insistence on his Indigeneity disrupts sharp divides between virtuality and the real world.

Hausman's world pushes against the notion of virtual reality and technology as exclusively Western scientific tools that are inherently filial to capitalistic, extractive endeavors and suggests that, in the care of Indigenous creators, technovation can serve the vibrant, layered, and enduring worlds of Turtle Island. One can infer from intimations in the novel that when Art virtually reconstructed Removal, he also rejuvenated the stories and creatures that called that place home as well. This bending of time and existence suggests a capacious Cherokee cosmology that disrupts any framing of Removal as a clean break. The Misfits invoke a return and continuation of Cherokee worlds that have adapted to survive the enduring grind of colonialism. The world we encounter in Hausman's novel is a kinstillation, in which beings and stories stretch across time and space, coexisting and interrelated, even when humans and other-than-humans fail to recognize their interconnectedness. The monetization of the TREPP—and Tallulah's complicity in it—fails to recognize this mutual accountability, but such a failure does not erase this. In fact, the violation of these reciprocal relations leads the ride to go off the rails.

Despite Jim Campbell's attempt to monetize Art's invention, the TREPP's programming bucks totalized colonization and control of the programming. The Misfits



stage a revolt, and the ride goes haywire, frightening its human passengers. There are suggestions that Art himself is haunting the machine, somehow living on through the code—that not only the Misfits, but his presence as well, help disrupt the ride as it slowly begins to break down for Group 5709. In this way, the novel offers a distinctly Cherokee understanding of how to relate to a computerized world, especially one constructed by a Cherokee person (Grandpa Art).<sup>9</sup> It also invokes the critical reminder that Indigenous people themselves “have been declared non-human by scientists and preachers alike” for centuries (Lewis et al., 14) and that AI and the virtual world of TREPP are not simply produced by code but also by the metal and organic materials mined to craft the physical infrastructure (Lewis et al., 12). The sentient Misfits in the Ride force the novel’s readers to contend with an understanding of reality that is porous and relational. The novel does not linger on where the Misfits come from. What is most important is that they exist and deserve to be appreciated as members of a larger Cherokee collective.

While the Nunnerator has crawled inside Tallulah’s head, potentially influencing her dissatisfaction at work, it is when the Misfits begin crawling into the heads of the riders that the TREPP begins to short-circuit. While the human aim of the ride is to control the machine, the Misfits subsequently begin to control the humans. In addition to its challenge to humans’ desire for total control, the novel also critiques how riders

demand access to Cherokee peoples' bodies, through their proximity to Tallulah and the donning of Realskyn chairsuits. Her presence is a necessary component of the fully immersive experience. As a tour guide, she not only has to recount facts about the Trail of Tears and Cherokee history, but she affectively has to perform her experiential trauma as a Cherokee person:

Spencer breaks the silence. "Hey, Tallulah?"

"Yes."

"Are you, like, offended by the Jeep Cherokee?"

Rachel Rosenberg rolls over onto her back and answers for Tallulah. "Of course she's offended. How could she not be?"

But Spencer is not satisfied by Rachel's response. He wants to hear it straight from the Indian's mouth—he wants Tallulah's own authentic analysis of the Jeep Cherokee. (144)

Tallulah's embodied, fleshy Cherokee self is a critical component of the virtual experience. Even before the novel directly blurs the line between virtual and material life, it indicts how re-narrations of the genocidal acts of settler colonialism, in this case, the Trail of Tears, necessitate the presence of "real" Native people.



As both Maile Arvin (Kānaka Maoli) and Audra Simpson (Mohawk) argue, this is especially true for Indigenous women. For Arvin, “possession, rather than elimination, articulates more fully the ways in which settler colonial practices of elimination and replacement are continuously deferred” (Arvin, 16). She argues that heteropatriarchy is especially important to colonial possessiveness. Indigenous Two-Spirit, Queer, Trans, and woman-identifying people often carry the additional burden of heteropatriarchal and misogynistic understandings of gender and sexuality that underscore settler occupation and justify the surveillance and control of Indigenous bodies. Similarly, Audra Simpson insists that Indigenous women’s bodies, especially within matrilineal kinship structures like those of the Haudenosaunee (and Cherokees), are loaded with signification in settler society: “[A]n Indian woman’s body in settler regimes such as the US, in Canada is loaded with meaning - signifying other political orders, land itself, of the dangerous possibility of reproducing Indian life and most dangerously, other political orders. Other life forms, other sovereignties, other forms of political will” (“The State Is a Man,” 29).

While *Riding the Trail of Tears* is in many ways a farcical critique of settler preoccupations with the co-opting and consumption of Indigenous life and culture, it is also a narrative about foregrounding the experiences of Cherokee women that prioritizes women’s healing and well-being as necessary to the resurgence of the

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People.<sup>10</sup> By willingly acknowledging her virtual kin in the ride, Tallulah can work through the grief of her father's death and all of the loss that constellated out from it. It is through her own physical tears, rather than the virtual Trail of Tears, that Tallulah finds peace, and that the Misfits find their freedom. In the climactic moment where she cries, Tallulah serves as a synecdoche, a conduit for the many threads of place and history that run through the narrative, as well as the dream, virtual, and "real" planes of the novel. She invokes the gorge and falls she is named after, the First Woman Cherokee creation story, her recurring dream, and the Misfit's prophecy. She embodies rematriation in many forms, and all of these worlds converge as she begins to weep.<sup>11</sup> In Hausman's novel, this is the power of Cherokee women; they bring about the change necessary to restore balance to the various virtual and fleshy Cherokees we encounter in the novel. It is Tallulah's confrontation with the grief she feels over her father's early death and the sense of shame she feels for her complicity in establishing the TREPP and monetizing her people's history and her grandfather's vision that catalyzes other characters' own journeys toward healing and growth.<sup>12</sup>

### **Resurgent Pleasure**

In "Notes from the Melting Pot: 463 Years After Cherokees Met DeSoto," Hausman comments on non-Indigenous people's "obsession with the spirituality of suffering that Indians were supposed to have" ("Notes," 236). One of the side effects of Tallulah's work on the TREPP is a deadening of her emotional and spiritual relationship



to the histories that the ride attempts to capture. Because she is constantly asked to perform the role of authentic informant, she has distanced herself from an embodied sense of herself as a Cherokee person. One of the most profound losses of settler occupation for Cherokee people has been the erosion of matrilineal networks. Constellations of care, dictated by gadugi (commitments to one another as Cherokee people) and kinship structures, ensure everyone has a place in Cherokee cosmologies and that everyone is cared for, what Julie Reed (Cherokee Nation) terms *osdv iyunvnehi* (roughly translated by Reed as welfare) (Reed, 5). The erosion of matrilineal and clan structures damaged this web of relations but did not destroy them.

Understanding Tallulah in this way helps us interpret the somewhat unexpected ending to the novel (every time I teach *Riding the Trail of Tears*, my students struggle to make sense of it—and awkwardly giggle), in which Bushyhead, Tallulah’s Cuban-Cherokee co-worker performs cunnilingus on her in the shower. The novel ends with Tallulah’s pleasure as she reaches orgasm. I read this final scene through Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s notion of everyday resurgent practice as an act of healing for Tallulah as a Cherokee person—and more specifically, as a Cherokee woman (*As We Have*, 193). It is a moment of sensual embodiment between two Cherokee people. It is not about performing their trauma for a non-Native audience (TREPP riders or the novel’s readers) but about their pleasure and joy. More specifically, it is about them

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finding joy in Tallulah's pleasure. If, as Audra Simpson suggests, Indigenous women pose an enormous threat to the colonial order, then Indigenous women's sexual pleasure and ability to experience embodied ecstasy are acts of affirmative refusal— of survivance. In arguing that "Native pleasure subverts the settler colonial state that tries to make Native existence miserable and therefore untenable", Scott Andrews (Cherokee Nation) coins the term "jouissance" to interrogate the radical decolonial potential of Indigenous "sexual joy that enacts continuity with one's ancestors, one's descendants, and, many times, the land" (Andrews).<sup>13</sup> We can read the novel's shower scene as one of jouissance. In the shower, Tallulah strips away all of the corrosive colonial signifiers that attempt to control and own Cherokeeness, through vehicle branding, cultural appropriation, and the "trauma porn" narrative of the ride, all of which stage genocide as a shocking, consumptive spectacle, a feedback loop not unlike that of the TREPP that enables individuals to relive the Trail of Tears over and over in an attempt to numb its significance as a settler technology of profound violence.

In the novel's final paragraphs, Tallulah achieves climax, and the various understandings of water as evocative of healing, life-giving, and of women's power all constellate – or kinstillate. Half of the human body is water; in this scene, water is a reminder of the porosity between worlds, as ever-moving and interconnected to lifeforms on Earth. Throughout the novel, water serves as a vital source of freedom for the virtual and human Cherokee characters, but also brings them together. Tallulah's



encounters with the Little People allow her to renegotiate her relationships with the world around her. Perhaps *because* of her involvement in helping to construct the TREPP and *because* she is Art's kin, the virtual world of the ride is a necessary part of her healing, and vice versa—the virtual Cherokees in the ride need Tallulah in order to free themselves. *Riding the Trail of Tears* demonstrates the necessity of Indigenous science, what Megan Bang, Ananda Marin, and Douglas Medin term “relational epistemologies”, when creating and engaging with AI and other life-producing robotics and technology (151). Instead of affirming a stance of Removal and distance between living beings, the novel suggests that we learn to make kin with everyone. Technovation in the novel serves as a kind of shared code, a reminder to Cherokee readers that technovation and adaptation have been critical to the continued vibrancy of Cherokee people, especially under colonial occupation. The novel's blurring between the virtual and the material is less an interplay about distinctions between the two and more a way for Hausman to emphasize the endurance of Cherokee cosmologies and creatures; even in virtual worlds, Cherokee beings find ways to be in community with one another.

### **Robots Aren't the Enemy: Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse***

While Wilson's *Robopocalypse* trilogy is less explicitly about Cherokee lives and histories, like *Riding the Trail of Tears*, the series insists that Indigenous notions of

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kinship and reciprocity are necessary to engage with a changing human and other-than-human world. *Robopocalypse* and *Robogenesis* detail a near-future world in which robots become sentient, stage global warfare, and are barely stopped from destroying all of humanity – twice. Yet Wilson’s technohorror novels do not situate robots as the unquestionable enemies in this dystopic future. Instead, they invite their readers to reflect on how humans and robots might learn to make kin with one another and negotiate the contours of a “new world.” In doing so, Wilson contributes to a well-trodden sci-fi tradition of exploring the potential personhood of robots and the relationship between humans and machines established by science fiction staples like Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950), Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) or the Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).<sup>14</sup> However, Wilson’s analysis of human-robot relations offers its readers something distinct, a rich reflection on a changing world that is deeply informed by Cherokee technovation.<sup>15</sup> I contend that the novel invites both its characters and its readers to reflect on the end of a twenty-first-century world dominated by imperial regimes in order to reckon with the destructive forces of neoliberalism, environmental degradation, and warfare. At the same time, Wilson foregrounds Indigenous place-based ontologies (the Osage Nation) and Indigenous people who utilize ancestral knowledge of survivance to acclimate to a changing global environment. Having survived the world-altering traumas of colonization, warfare, and Removal, Indigenous characters in the novels are acutely reminded of the need to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining



an ethics of responsibility and relationality older than colonialism. When characters, whether or not they are Indigenous, fail to consciously embody these kinstillatory ethics with the other-than-human world, trouble ensues.

*Robopocalypse* begins with Cormac Wallace, aka “Bright Boy,” a soldier in Gray Horse Army, finding an archive of sorts preserved in a black box in the Yukon. It includes video footage that Archos, the AI orchestrating the titular robopocalypse, has compiled to preserve the details of the robot uprising. Cormac decides to transcribe what he finds on the black cube, and it is his transcription, *The Hero Archive*, that we are reading. While the cube was preserving data to share with future robots, Cormac repurposes the footage to narrate, in book form, the collective efforts of humans, robots, and human-robot hybrids to destroy Archos. Much like the TREPP, Archos is presented as something (and someone) that defies the limited notions of sentience, being, and lifespan that dominate Western discourse.

The *Robopocalypse* novels explicitly links the AI uprising to over five hundred years of capitalist-colonialist extraction and exploitation in the Americas . Driving this point home, it is Thanksgiving Day in the U.S. when the robots launch their mass incarceration and destruction of humanity. The colonized, dispossessed, and marginalized in Wilson’s novel fare better than the enfranchised and privileged because they already know how to live outside the surveillance state. However, all

humans—and robots—are forced to contend with the aftershock of human technological innovations produced to kill, harm, and control; the same colonial regime produced by humans is used to colonize and destroy *them*.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that all the locations significant to the novels are sites of U.S. settler-occupation or paramilitary power: the so-called United States, Afghanistan, and Japan. Japan and the nuclear histories that it invokes are especially vital to the nuclear subtext of both *Robopocalypse* and *Robogenesis*. Wilson constructs what Lou Cornum (Diné) terms "nuclear apocalypse," a term Cornum uses to "further understand and complicate the triumvirate of analytics (dispossession of Indigenous life, fungibility of Black flesh, and nonenslaved Asian labor) that structure modernity and make possible its undoing" ("Radioactive Intimacies"). In addition, Cornum understands nuclear war in Japan "as an extension of and indeed part of the ongoing and never-ending Indian Wars fought in Canada and the United States. In this way, the atomic bomb and other uses of uranium by Western nation-states highlight the related projects of settler colonialism and imperialism abroad."

It is not technological advancements that make Archos' global takeover possible; it is environmental degradation and nuclear apocalypse brought on by humans. The critical catalyst of the robot uprising is a nuclear testing site in western Alaska. There, the robot orchestrating the uprising, Archos-14, has enough power to



generate and sustain communication with all robots, also called avtomats, across the globe.<sup>16</sup> The Ragnarok Intelligence Field, Archos' mainframe, is located in a remote part of western Alaska near the Yukon. Dwight Bowie, who leads the drilling project, is commissioned by the cryptic company Novus to drill down forty-two hundred feet to a cavern where his team is to set up monitoring equipment that will attach to a giant antenna (*Robopocalypse*, 98-99). What Bowie and the team do not realize is that Archos is the one who has commissioned the project, and he plans to use the antenna to transmit messages to robots around the world. Eventually, Bowie realizes what is going on: "[I]t's a *blast cavity*. This place was a nuke testing ground. That big-diameter borehole was drilled so they could place a nuclear device down there. When it was detonated, the bomb vaporized a spherical cavern [...] That radioactive case down there is as close to hell as you can get here on earth. And we got sent here to drill *straight into it*" (101). In addition, Bowie realizes that all of the communications he has received from Novus and their North Star drilling company were actually transmitted from the hole in the ground. Unfortunately, Bowie does not live to share his findings with others, but we learn of them secondhand through Cormac Wallace's book. Bowie realizes what is happening because he has experience working in other extractive, toxic nuclear zones. In passing, Bowie mentions his prior experience in the Alberta oil sands, arguably one of the most polluted casualties of the oil and natural gas industry in the world and a critical site of Indigenous protests in the decade-plus years since

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*Robopocalypse's* publication. By learning of the Ragnarok Intelligence Field through Bowie, the novel makes explicit the connections, the "radioactive intimacies," between the secret uranium blast site in Alaska and other global projects of extraction.<sup>17</sup>

The novels' climactic final scenes are all staged at two nuclear sites, both of which occupy Indigenous homelands: Ragnarok in *Robopocalypse* and Cheyenne Mountain, aka Freeborn City, in *Robogenesis*.<sup>18</sup> These intimacies between nuclear degradation and Indigenous dispossession are a throughline in both novels. Because radiation is too harmful to humans, they require assistance from Freeborn (robots that think for themselves and resist the messaging of Archos in the first book and Arayt in the second). In the first novel, Archos is only destroyed because the Freeborn robot Nine-Oh-Two agrees to sacrifice himself and travel down to the bottom of the pit at Ragnarok to destroy Archos and his antenna. In the world of *Robopocalypse*, those who slip between a dichotomous human-robot divide or reject sharp divisions between humans and robots have the talent and strength needed to save humanity. In the novel, a re-entrenched insider-outsider dialectic does not serve humans—or robots—nor do misogynistic, ego-driven approaches to survival in a post-New War world that places a premium on brute force and aggression. This critique is most evident in the novels' staging of the Osage Nation as key to building an inclusive community of humans and Freeborn robots that is difficult for Archos to penetrate and critical to the resistance. In



the *Robopocalypse* novels, there is no defeating the genocidal robot takeover without Indigenous people, without Indian Country.

## **Ko-wah-hos-sta**

Wilson avoids science fiction tropes of Indigeneity as primitive, of the past, and discretely separate from the futuristic or technologically-advanced worlds of the plot's main action.<sup>19</sup> Instead, he presents imperfect Osage and Cherokee characters grappling with a changing world, some of whom, like Tallulah in *Riding the Trail of Tears*, are resistant to cultural teachings that emphasize collaboration and reciprocity, i.e. kinstillation, over self-interest. It is through their embrace of grounded, land-based relational thinking that characters in the *Robopocalypse* universe can curtail global robot domination. The Osage Nation is a space of healing and rejuvenation that, at least for a time, is shielded from the surveillance of Archos and his robot minions, in large part because so much of the Nation is rural and off the grid. While the Nation's remoteness aids Osages during the New War, its remoteness does not mean the Nation has not been touched by the same histories of violence and extraction as the novels' other key locations. Lonnie Wayne Blanton is a pivotal character throughout the series. He worked as a police officer for the state of Oklahoma until he witnessed a robot attack in Tulsa. After that, he joined the Osage National Lighthouse tribal police.<sup>20</sup> We follow a subplot storyline with his son, Paul Blanton, who is fighting in Afghanistan

when Zero Hour occurs. These two characters, as father and son, highlight the global intimacies of U.S. empire.<sup>21</sup> While the Nation is hidden from Archos because he fails to recognize the contours of Indian Country that may not easily register on a U.S. map, Osage residents are keenly aware of how their nation is interconnected to global projects of coloniality, resource extraction, and warfare.

In addition to highlighting how settler U.S. empire has shaped environmental devastation on Indigenous land and produced a global network of radioactive intimacies, the novel suggests sacred Indigenous spaces are imbued with the power and strength to combat these destructive forces if people remember how to relate to them and to each other in a good way. At Zero Hour, when the New War begins, Lonnie is with other Osage people at Gray Horse, Ko-wah-hos-tsa. It is difficult to find on a map, and he explains that while the U.S. government picked the name of the road that leads there, County Road 5451, the United States does not have access to the sacredness of the space. In fact, the road does not get you all the way there; settler cartographies cannot contain it, and to access it, you must be invited. When things begin to go off the rails, many Osages head out to Ko-wah-hos-tsa because "when you get the tar knocked out of you, you beat a trail back home soon as you can" (*Robopocalypse* 141). Lonnie explains to readers why Ko-wah-hos-tsa is special: "[I]t is the heart of our people." (141). Gray Horse is where Osages moved after they experienced the trauma of Removal to a reservation in Indian Territory in the



nineteenth century. Having little choice, they agreed to move to a reservation carved out of their previous homelands, then occupied by the Cherokee Nation, to escape the harassment and violence of white settler-squatters in Kansas. Lonnie explains that moving to Ko-wah-hos-tsa fulfilled a prophecy that the people would move to a new territory and find great wealth there. He attributes that to the “oil flowing underneath our land” (141). Beneath the ground are large oil and natural gas deposits that brought the Osage Nation much financial wealth in the twentieth century, but that wealth also brought violence. In the first decades of the twentieth century, dozens of Osage people, many of whom were women, were murdered by greedy non-Native people in order to acquire Osage mineral rights for personal gain.

While connected to a broader network of radioactive intimacies and geological extraction, the Osage Nation, or Ko-wah-hos-tsa, rather, is positioned as a refuge from violence and warfare in the first novel, a marker of deep time and things that exceed human knowability. There is a profundity at home there that is older than settler colonialism and forced Removals: “[I]n that misty time before history, dark-haired, dark-eyed folks just like the ones on this road were out here building mounds to rival the Egyptian pyramids. We took care of this land, and after a lot of heartache and tears, she paid us back in spades” (141). In this, we see an understanding of land-human relations that is distinctly not settler colonial. The land is described capacious terms not

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delineated by national or reservation borders, but with reverence for Indigenous caretakers' ancestral knowledge. It is the *practice* of being in good relation with the broader stretch of the Great Plains for centuries and centuries that has established a sense of trust and mutual accountability between the land and Osage people, not necessarily exclusive of the specific lands within the current Osage Nation's borders. Conceiving of land-human relationships in this way is especially important for Indigenous peoples with long histories of migration and Removal, including Osage and Cherokee people. As the New War began, national borders became less important, and in some cases, harmful. While the Osage Nation is a critical site of refuge and resistance in the novel, *Ko-wah-hos-tsa*, specifically, proves most potent. *Ko-wah-hos-tsa* is significant because it is home to *l'n-Lon-scka*, the Osage "big dance." Lonnie describes the annual June gathering as a "migration" and explains that "the path becomes familiar to your soul" (141). Even while the dance is held in a specific sacred space, just as critical is the journey Osages take to be in spiritual fellowship with one another. Lonnie's explanation of what makes *Ko-wah-hos-tsa* so special emphasizes transition and movement, both from place to place and from season to season.

In one of the most moving moments of the novel, Lonnie takes us with him to the dance. While there, he experiences a profoundly spiritual vision, witnessed through his "mind's eye," that foreshadows the plot of *Robopocalypse* (147). He replays an early



scene from the novel when he is called in to help a young fast-food worker in Tulsa, Felipe, who was attacked by a “domestic” robot designed to help with service work. As Felipe lay dying, Lonnie promised that he would ensure robots did not harm anyone else. As Lonnie dances in the present, this past moment with Felipe shifts. Lonnie now sees the murderous robot who killed Felipe hand Lonnie a paper crane, a symbol of peace in the atomic era and a reminder of the children who died from radiation exposure at Hiroshima. When Lonnie emerges from the vision, he realizes that he and another Osage man, Hank Cotton, have been “dancing for hours, robotically” (147). Subtly, this scene blurs the lines between human and robot, “tradition” and innovation. Once Lonnie stops dancing, he and others see a white man and child enter the dance grounds. The boy is painted red, but not by the drumkeeper, and Lonnie and the others realize that their interruption is prophetic. For the rest of the New War, “the Osage Nation never turned away a single human survivor [...] As a result, Gray Horse grew into a bastion of human resistance” (*Robopocalypse* 149). Gray Horse Army, a paramilitary group formed in the Osage Nation from Osage and non-Osage human fighters and Freeborn robot refugees, becomes one of the most successful resistance operations of the New War. It continues to thrive as long as it maintains a practice of inclusion.

If the New War has conjured forth a New World, the visions at Ko-wah-hos-tsa encourage the survivors not to replicate the structures of difference-as-violence promulgated under the previous world order. Collectively, Lonnie's vision and the prophetic emergence of the man and child caution against xenophobic allegiances. A foreshadowing scene that occurs immediately before the dance reiterates the necessity of working across differences to combat genocidal evil.<sup>22</sup> Hank Cotton argues that only Osages should be allowed to attend the gathering because this is how things have always been. He is especially keen to exclude a young Cherokee boy named Lark Iron Cloud, whom he perceives as a thug. (Lark eventually becomes one of the bravest fighters in Gray Horse Army as they march to Alaska to take on Archos.) Hank's xenophobia is eventually his downfall, as well as that of Gray Horse Army and the resistance stronghold in the Osage Nation. Through Hank's story, the novels reject simplistic notions of Indigeneity as inherent goodness; Wilson foregrounds Indigenous epistemologies—Indigenous kinstillatory ethics—not identitarian politics. In *Robogenesis*, Arayt gains control of Hank's mind and weaponizes Hank's already existing proclivity to exclusionary politics that reaffirm phenotypic, essentialist classifications of Indigeneity. Hank cultivates exclusivity in Gray Horse Army and persuades other Osage people to exclude all non-Native people and robots from the Nation. He views the influx of refugees as another group of settlers who will eventually take over: "Why, if we don't nip this in the bud, I get the feeling that pretty soon everything that's old will be new again. Does anybody remember how the Osage



ended up kicked out of Missouri in the first place? These Great Plains are ours, right about now, and damned if I don't intend to keep it that way" (*Robogenesis*, 114). In the end, this exclusionary thinking is Hank's downfall, as well as the community and army at Gray Horse. Hank perpetuates settler logics that understands land as property to be owned and controlled, replicating ideas about xenophobic exclusivity that reinscribe divisive logics of race and blood quantum that have had devastating effects on Native communities. His anger draws him away from Osage teachings, leaving him vulnerable to outside influences that feed his ego to control him.

### **"Mama Didn't Trust It"**

In *Robogenesis*, Arayt takes over Hank's mind because Hank chooses to ignore something his mother told him as a child – advice passed down since Removal. In Alaska, at the end of the New War, he is drawn to the glowing light of a small box and reminded of his mother's story about seeing a similar aura, "a spooklight," when she was a young girl.<sup>23</sup> She explained to Hank that it was a relic of the Trail of Tears and Removal:

You do not have to admire the Cherokee for surviving it. The legend was that this ball of light came folding out of the blood-soaked grounds after it was over, like a kind of tombstone. Something from beyond this world,

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here to offer a reminder of how much men can suffer. Maybe this spotlight is the same. Is it here to mark our loss? God knows that men suffered in these woods. Mama didn't trust it. Devil's work she said. (*Robogenesis*, 26).

Hank's mother's story suggests that whatever powers Arayt has harnessed are connected to an older, deeper presence. Again, in the *Robocalypse* world, Artificial Intelligence is nothing new, nor are the underlying entities or spirits within it. Hank is Osage, not Cherokee, but the emphasis on what was learned from Cherokee Removal strikes a poignant chord in the novel that echoes *Riding the Trail of Tears'* reminder to listen to intergenerational matriarchal knowledge. In the case of Hank's mother, her knowledge grew out of a relationship with the other-than-human world but also attends to historical ruptures in relationships with particular places, what Grace Dillon terms "Indigenous scientific literacy" (Dillon 7). The box's "bad medicine" is all the ugliness, anger, and grief accompanying the Trail of Tears and its aftermath (54). By listening to the box, Hank gives in to feelings of anger instead of healing and growth. Indigenous peoples, like the Cherokee, who were forced to occupy other peoples' ancestral homelands through Removal, were necessarily required to adapt kinstituted ontologies to place and home. Cherokee and Osage peoples' ability to renegotiate land-based relationships after Removal to Indian Territory are acts of care that recognize theirs as an interdependent and mutually responsible world.<sup>24</sup> Hank's



mother's story carries the knowledge of these painful histories, so that future kin can learn from them.

In *Robocalypse*, women, girls, and maternal figures not only remind others of the need to work against heteropatriarchal settler logics of competition, exclusion, and individuation, but they are also the ones whose skills and stories have the power to save the world. The telepathy of a young transhuman girl, Mathilda Perez, and the song of a hybridized robot woman, Mikiko, have global resonances that turn the tides of warfare. Their heroism is essential to the survival of entire species; their voices are literally and figuratively essential for combating large-scale genocide. As is the case in *Riding the Trail of Tears*, the fate of humans and their other-than-human kin is indebted to women and girls who are willing to sacrifice for the people, invoking Selu, the corn mother of Cherokee people whose sacrifice we are all indebted to. Mathilda and Mikiko use their perceptive powers to organize resistance fighters collectively in both novels. Mathilda uses her ocular prosthetics, computerized eyes that allow her to see and understand robot communications, to predict and transmit the movements of the "Big Robs" (Archos and Arayt) to Nine-Oh-Two and other Freeborn resistance fighters. Mikiko, a love doll Takeo Nomura built to emulate his deceased human wife, transmits a song across the radio waves in

*Robopocalypse* that encourages other robots to resist Archos' indoctrination into his human-killing, human-controlling army and think for themselves; she is the mother of the Freeborn (*Robogenesis*, 416). In *Robogenesis*, Mikiko experiences a pivotal transformation. She is summoned by Ryujin, a "deep mind" that is producing natural robots in the sea off of Tokyo, to join him at the bottom of the ocean. After sacrificing her life to Ryujin, Mikiko is reborn, a manifestation of his dream, something simultaneously organic and robot: ikimono. She is equipped with insect-woven "living armor" and makes her way to Cheyenne Mountain to once again help Freeborn and humans defeat Arayt (410). She traverses across nuclear geographies that establish intimacies between seemingly distant peoples and places. These radioactive intimacies demonstrate how world warfare and global extraction have renegotiated spatial and temporal relationalities. Importantly, it is hybridized femme characters who blur the human-robot divide that are key players in the resistance. Through selfless acts that prioritize the good of others, the collective, they are critical to thwarting a total robot takeover. They utilize story through telepathic messaging and song to speak across the radioactive intimacies of the novel and help robots, transhumans, and humans alike realize that there are others like them and that they collectively have the potential to win the war through cooperation.



By emphasizing radioactive intimacies, Indigenous grounded knowledge, and matriarchal leadership, Wilson’s novel presciently asks his readers to think seriously about how to navigate increasingly sophisticated advancements in Artificial Intelligence. He suggests that longstanding practices of technovation grounded in kinstillatory ethics are critical to avoiding the threat of “human extinction” that numerous scientists in our current historical moment are cautioning could become a real possibility without more profound reflection on the ethics of AI technology.<sup>25</sup> By staging a familiar sci-fi narrative arc across geographies of U.S. imperial intervention, Wilson lays bare the colonial underpinnings of much science fiction and scientific narratives of “progress” and “advancement.” The novels in the series suggest that to address existential questions surrounding technological advancements in AI, experts must attend to the long histories of extraction, dispossession, enslavement, heteropatriarchy, and racial capitalism that made Western science possible. More importantly, they must listen to those most acutely impacted by these histories and must be willing to acknowledge and work against the regimes of power they ushered into being that still control most of the globe. As Wilson, Hausman, and others suggest, these histories are baked into the logic, the code, if you will, that underpins scientific inquiry. Without change, it’s a case of new robots, same old story.

### Conclusion

In *Riding the Trail of Tears* and the *Robopocalypse* trilogy, Removal serves a necessary pedagogical function for the novels' characters and readers. It reminds those who have experienced the apocalyptic upheavals of Removal from homelands and relations with the other-than-human world that their ancestors have experienced traumatic and profound change before, and yet, the People have endured. Even the violent settler technology of Removal was prophesied by our Cherokee ancestors.<sup>26</sup>

While Cherokee people brought the sacred fire to Indian Territory, not all of our other-than-human relatives, including plants, animals, and mountains, could come with us. We necessarily had to learn to make kin in new ways. Change-as-vitality is a strong throughline in both Hausman's and Wilson's work. Both Hausman and Wilson celebrate the beauty and the power of Cherokee technovation, the ability of Cherokee stories, cosmologies, lifeways, and peoples to continue to adapt and change to the world as needed and the belief that they can do so. As Lonnie's son Paul observes in *Robopocalypse*, "technology changes, but people stay the same" (261). In the *Robopocalypse* series, one of the critical changes to robots is their ability to become more organic and interconnected to the natural world; Mikiko is the most prominent and potent example of this. Instead of bending ecosystems to their will, robots adapt to fit those ecosystems; they make kin. Moreover, the humans willing to recognize that their survival depends on all of the others around them are those that fare best in the novels. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) writes that "our biology is only a very



small part of our humanity; the rest is a process of becoming” (Justice 33). *Riding the Trail of Tears* and the *Robopocalypse* series interrogate this by employing an ethos of Cherokee technovation. Instead of inciting fear about technological advancements, their fiction reminds readers that Cherokee intellectualism, philosophy, and scientific inquiry already offer robust strategies for making sense of an always-changing world.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Eva Garrouette (Cherokee Nation) translated the Cherokee language version of her name included in the painting and was gracious enough to walk me, someone just starting to learn the Cherokee language, through her translation.

<sup>2</sup> James Mooney records one version of this story in *Myths of The Cherokees*. Kathi Smith Littlejohn retells the story in *Living Stories of the Cherokee*, edited by Barbara R. Duncan, and Chris Teuton recounts Hasting Shade’s version of the story in *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars’ Club*.

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that while there is a long history of Indigenous futurists, much of this emerging Indigenous speculative work is indebted to the rich and enduring legacy of Afrofuturism. For more on Afrofuturism, see Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Lawrence Hill Books, 2013; Alex Zamalin, *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism*, Columbia UP, 2019. For more on the history of Indigenous futurism in visual and performance art, see Billy-Ray Belcourt and Lindsay Nixon, "What Do We Mean by Queer Indigenous Ethics?" *canadianart*, 23 May 2018, <https://canadianart.ca/features/what-do-we-mean-by-queerindigenousethics/>.

<sup>4</sup> As just a few examples, I am thinking of Cherokee Robot's *Adalonushegi (Trickster)* video game, Don Thornton's language apps, Joseph Erb's work with computer animation, or the voice capture used for Cherokee Nation's animated short film "Sequoyah: Voice of the Inventor for the Bicentennial," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJldPLQLbL8>.

<sup>5</sup> For more on "going Native" as entertainment, see Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*, Cornell UP, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> There are only a few scholarly pieces that take up the novel in detail. See Eric Gary Anderson and Melanie Benson Taylor, "Letting the Other Story Go: The Native South in and beyond the Anthropocene" *Native South*, 12, 2019, 74-98, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nso.2019.0005>; Joshua Jackson and Megan Vallowe, "Cherokee Historical Fiction and Indigenous Science Fiction in *Riding the Trail of Tears*," *MELUS* vol., 45, no. 4, Winter 2020, 113-132, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/795409>. Miriam C. Spiers's *Encountering the Sovereign Other: Indigenous Science Fiction*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Art's machine is not entirely unlike the Remember the Removal annual bike ride where Eastern Band and Cherokee Nation youth retrace the over 950-mile trek that their ancestors traveled during the Trail of Tears; Art's creation is a means of homage, albeit a slightly unnerving one. The use of the Jeep Cherokee reflects the interconnections of mobility and travel that mark Cherokee survivance and genocidal federal Indian policies like Removal and allotment.

<sup>8</sup> Jeep manufactures two vehicle lines, the Jeep Cherokee and the Jeep Grand Cherokee.

<sup>9</sup> In "Making Kin with the Machines," co-authored by Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechwis, and Suzanne Kite, Pechwis (Cree) suggests that one way to address potential concerns that AI could pose for humans and, more specifically, to Indigenous communities, would be to have programming languages grounded in Indigenous languages. She suggests that programming grounded in Indigenous values could potentially influence the AI to relate to humans and other-than-humans using Indigenous protocols of respect and reciprocity. For many Indigenous communities, communal values are built into their language(s) (9).



<sup>10</sup> Near the novel's end, Tallulah also reflects on Ahyoka's legacy. She tells the reader that she has fought for four years for TREPP to build a state of Ahyoka in addition to the one they have of Sequoyah because "she was no less essential than her father" (366-7).

<sup>11</sup> I am using the definition of rematriation developed by the Sogorea Te' Land Trust. "Rematriation," *Sogorea Te' Land Trust*, <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/what-is-rematriation/>.

<sup>12</sup> At one point in the novel, Irma describes the relationship Tallulah feels with her homelands: "She remembered Tallulah Wilson, the way she spoke about Asheville and the Carolina mountains, the sense of urgency and sound of matriotic nostalgia in her voice" (194).

<sup>13</sup> I have shared multiple neologisms used by Cherokee and other Indigenous scholars throughout this essay. This bending, shaping, and renegotiating of the English language is arguably its own form of technovation.

<sup>14</sup> Thank you to Scott Andrews for reminding me of the connection between Asimov's and Wilson's series. Both authors invite their readers to tarry with similar existential questions.

<sup>15</sup> The only extended analysis of Wilson's series I found was in Mark Rifkin's *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*, Durham: Duke UP, 2019; Marija Grech's "Technological Appendages and Organic Prostheses: Robo-Human Appropriations and Cyborgian Becoming in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*," *Word and Text*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2013, pp. 85-95.

<sup>16</sup> Early in the novel, we learn that Professor Nicholas Wasserman is responsible for Archos' awakening as a sentient being capable of global mass destruction. Importantly, Wasserman insists he did not create Archos; he only summoned him. Wasserman describes what he wrote into the code as "incantations" and explains that everything needed to construct Archos already existed (*Robopocalypse*, 16).

<sup>17</sup> Bowie also tells us they fly into Deadhorse before heading to the drilling site. Deadhorse is an important hub for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System.

<sup>18</sup> In *Robogenesis*, Cheyenne Mountain houses a supercomputer complex built to sustain nuclear blasts. The combination of its tech and its security from outside attacks makes it especially appealing to Arayt, the ultimate evil robot in Wilson's sequel.

<sup>19</sup> I am thinking, for example, of the infamously offensive scenes in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931).

<sup>20</sup> Importantly, Lonnie is also one of the first humans recorded by Archos' black box to witness the robot uprising. While the takeover is global, there is also something familial and intimate about the stories told in *The Hero Archive*, aka *Robopocalypse*.

<sup>21</sup> Here, I am thinking of Lisa Lowe's discussion of intimacies in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Duke UP, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Throughout the series, there are strong echoes of *Lord of the Rings*. For example, to destroy Archos, you must destroy his all-seeing eye.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson is likely referencing a spook light sighted for almost one hundred and fifty years along the Oklahoma-Missouri border.

<sup>24</sup> This is not to mention the negotiation between the Osage Nation and Cherokee Nation that was necessary in Indian Territory; Cherokees were Removed to Osage homelands during the Trail of Tears.

<sup>25</sup> "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war," *Center for AI Safety*, <https://www.safe.ai/statement-on-ai-risk>.

<sup>26</sup> According to Daniel Heath Justice, "Although Cherokee wisdom traditions include stories about the creation of the world in what is now southern Appalachia, they also include stories about migrations and movements from lands far removed from those mountain ridges. The specter of removal first begins to haunt the Cherokees in these stories." (*Our Fire Survives the Storm* 48).



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