

THE GOONZETTE

Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis

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Press X to Respect: Why Gaming Whānau Hit Different Than Your Average Squad

Kia ora, team! Your boy Tommy here, and today we're breaking down the gaming community like it's fourth-and-goal footage. Now, before all you hardcore gamers start typing "cringe" in the chat, hear me out – I've been around enough locker rooms and online spaces to know real community when I see it.

Whakatōhia te mauri, whakatōhia te tapu – respect the life force, respect what's sacred. That's some ancient wisdom right there, and honestly? It applies to gaming culture more than you'd think. Sure, we got trolls making everything toxic, but underneath all that chaos, there's something genuinely beautiful happening.

Look, in the NFL, team chemistry was everything. You could have all the five-star recruits and million-dollar contracts, but if your squad couldn't gel, you'd get absolutely bodied come game day. Gaming communities operate on the same wavelength, except instead of running plays against the Ravens, you're coordinating raids or clutching up in ranked matches.

The real ones know that gaming spaces became lifelines during COVID when everyone was stuck inside going stir-crazy. While mainstream media was still calling gaming "antisocial," millions of people were building genuine friendships through shared digital experiences. That's some next-level community building that would make any Māori marae proud.

He waka eke noa – we're all in this together, no exceptions. This whakataukī hits different when you think about gaming culture's evolution. Yeah, we've got our problems – don't even get me started on the gatekeeping and harassment that's been poisoning the well for years. But we've also got incredible diversity now. Streamers from every background imaginable, accessibility features that actually work, and communities that celebrate skill regardless of who you are.

The speedrunning scene? Absolutely unmatched energy. These legends will spend thousands of hours perfecting frame-perfect tricks in games older than some of their viewers, all to shave milliseconds off

world records. That's the same obsessive dedication I used to see in film rooms, except instead of studying defensive formations, they're memorizing RNG manipulation patterns. Different sport, same warrior spirit.

And can we talk about how gaming communities handle knowledge sharing? In traditional sports, teams guard their playbooks like state secrets. But in gaming? The top players are literally streaming their strategies live, creating tutorials, and helping newcomers improve. That open-source approach to getting better together is honestly revolutionary.

The indie game scene especially gives me hope. Small development teams creating experiences that AAA studios with hundred-million-dollar budgets can't match. It's like watching an underdog team with heart demolish the league favorites because they actually understand what matters. These games often reflect their communities' values – inclusion, creativity, storytelling that actually resonates.

Sure, gaming culture has its mid moments. The constant discourse about which console is superior gets old fast (PC master race jokes were never funny, fight me). The gatekeeping around what makes someone a "real gamer" is straight embarrassing. And don't get me started on the comment sections when developers try to add basic accessibility features.

But here's what keeps me optimistic: the gaming whānau that shows up when it matters. Cancer patients getting surprise visits from their favorite streamers. Tournaments raising millions for charity. Communities rallying around members going through tough times. Veterans finding purpose through gaming therapy programs.

****Mā te huruhuru ka rere ai te manu** – it's the feathers that make the bird fly. Every gaming community needs its variety – the competitive players pushing limits, the casual enjoyers just having fun, the content creators keeping everyone entertained, the modders extending games' lifespans, the artists creating fan content that sometimes surpasses the original.**

The future of gaming communities looks bright, no cap. With VR getting less cursed, cross-platform play becoming standard, and younger generations who grew up online understanding digital etiquette better than us millennials ever did, we're heading somewhere special.

Gaming taught us that you can build meaningful relationships with people you've never met in person, that shared experiences transcend physical boundaries, and that sometimes the best communities form around the simple joy of playing together.

****K**ia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui** – be strong, be brave, be steadfast. Whether you're grinding ranked, exploring indie gems, or just vibing in single-player experiences, remember that you're part of something bigger.

GG, whānau. Keep respawning with that good energy.

Tommy out 

When Federal Courts Finally Listen: The Cherokee Nation v. Oklahoma Decision and What It Means for All of Us

Dave Standing There (Hoocąk Haci Nıjc)

Last month's decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Oklahoma* might not have made headlines in mainstream media, but it should have. Federal Judge Sarah Singleton's ruling that Oklahoma cannot unilaterally impose its environmental regulations on Cherokee Nation lands represents more than just another jurisdictional victory—it's a crack in the colonial framework that has constrained tribal sovereignty for over a century.

Let me be clear about what happened here. Oklahoma's Department of Environmental Quality tried to force the Cherokee Nation to comply with state water quality standards on tribal lands, despite the Nation having its own comprehensive environmental code that actually exceeds federal standards in several areas. The state's argument? That tribal environmental protection somehow threatens Oklahoma's broader water management goals.

This is the same paternalistic logic we've heard for generations: that Indigenous peoples can't be trusted to manage our own lands responsibly. Never mind that we've been stewarding these territories since time immemorial, or that our environmental laws often reflect deeper ecological understanding than the patchwork of federal and state regulations cobbled together by governments that view land primarily as commodity.

Judge Singleton saw through this. Her 47-page decision methodically dismantles Oklahoma's jurisdictional claims, but more importantly, it recognizes something fundamental: that tribal sovereignty isn't just about governing our own people—it's about governing our relationship with the land itself.

****T**he Broader Legal Landscape**

This decision builds on the momentum from **McGirt v. Oklahoma**, which reaffirmed that much of eastern Oklahoma remains Indian Country for criminal law purposes. But environmental jurisdiction is different. It's about who gets to decide how we protect water, air, and soil—the elements that don't recognize human-drawn boundaries but form the foundation of all life.

What makes the Cherokee decision particularly significant is how Judge Singleton analyzed the federal trust responsibility. Rather than treating it as a limitation on tribal authority—as federal courts have done for decades—she framed it as requiring federal support for tribal environmental governance. This interpretive shift could influence how courts approach everything from energy development to sacred site protection.

The Ho-Chunk Nation has been watching these developments closely. We've got our own battles with state overreach, particularly around our casino operations and hunting and fishing rights. But environmental sovereignty might be where we see the most meaningful expansion of tribal authority in the coming years.

****Strategic Implications****

For tribal advocates, this decision offers a roadmap. Notice how Cherokee Nation didn't just argue against state jurisdiction—they affirmatively demonstrated their own environmental governance capacity. Their legal team presented detailed evidence about tribal environmental programs, traditional ecological knowledge integration, and community consultation processes.

This is strategic litigation at its finest. Instead of playing defense against state encroachment, the Cherokee Nation went on offense, showcasing Indigenous governance as superior to state alternatives. Other tribes should take notes.

But we also need to be realistic about the backlash. Oklahoma's Attorney General has already announced plans to appeal, and you can bet other states are watching nervously. The oil and gas industry, in particular, has a vested interest in maintaining the current jurisdictional confusion that lets them shop for the most permissive regulatory environment.

****What's Next****

The real test will come in implementation. Federal recognition of tribal environmental authority means nothing if tribes lack the resources to exercise it effectively. Congress needs to fund tribal environmental programs at levels that reflect the actual scope of our jurisdiction, not the historically underfunded baseline that assumes state governments will handle most of the work.

We also need to think strategically about coalition building. Environmental justice organizations, which have often overlooked tribal sovereignty issues, are natural allies in these fights. Climate change is forcing everyone to reconsider how environmental governance works, and Indigenous nations are increasingly recognized as leaders in sustainable land management.

The Cherokee Nation decision won't solve everything. Federal Indian law remains a contradictory mess of colonial assumptions and sovereignty recognition. But it represents something important: a federal court finally acknowledging that tribal jurisdiction isn't just about governing people, but about governing relationships—between communities and land, between present needs and future generations, between human law and natural law.

That's not just good legal precedent. It's a foundation for the kind of governance our grandchildren will need to survive what's coming.

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