

"Amazing! A meta-nonfictional self-awareness run amok with twist after twist of twisted inside-outness. Thought provoking, inspiring, full of engaging characters doing interesting things, a good primer on the positive side of chosen homelessness and pop up community, direct action protest and disaster relief, alternative building methods, reservation life, vagabond cuisine and tons of sincerely comedic banter. A spiritual manifesto as the author uses dialog to wax philosophically while clever wordplay and lyrical phrasing polishes the prose."

"I can't seem to put my review into words because these words are so far beyond the way language is normally used. My favorite quality of philosophy is the ah-ha moment when something has been put into words that I've always felt and known as truth. The author's writing philosophy in a way I've never read it before, in a way it's never been told that I know of."

"When I was a kid, I read to escape 'reality.' The way I was being taught to understand the world left me feeling overwhelmed, so I would delve into the fantasy worlds of the books and become completely absorbed into the lives of the characters as I attempted to forget my own. This book on the other hand... This book helps you to remember. Remember the true nature of life, remember your own true nature. Remember your power and your inherent connection to this awe-inducing world. Remember what it means to truly be free."

"I liked it."

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Other titles kinda like this one
but not really

Step One: Save the World

Uncage Eden

Liberation's Garden

Vagabond Chic

The Galaxy's Guide to Hitchhiking

*A stranger mistook me for human,
nearly convinced me I was.*

*Crawling from the underneath of a world they've
forgotten to know.*

Grime of a time lost in tomorrow's memory.

At home inside an echo of the hidden.

Freedom rings the shadows.

Faint comfort beyond the outcast of light.

*A life obscured by the margins of some other person's
story.*

CHAPTER FOUR

Uh oh. DJ's writing again. Somewhat obsessed though to hear him tell it he's already two years behind before the end of week one. The first day he was lucky to squeeze out a complete sentence, a verbose constipation left little but a Rorschach on the papier. Please pardon my French, I do do it for fun though perhaps in poor taste, and also excuse my novel's novicity, not everyone has had the pleasure of prewriting volume before volume of inside-out prose.

As it turns out, this is not even my own internal dialogue, but rather another diluted convolution of the same free pen he picked up ages ago, so I hope you can understand my inability to be myself in front of such a limited studio audience. We'll start this engineer's drawing in reverse, because for him to tell it straight through would make entirely too much sense, which he somehow does more than most people I know while still managing to rattle on about the most pointless hypothesis.

I've known DJ since back at camp, you know, that armed mercenary winter blizzard Standing Rock camp. He was our hasenpfeffer chef extraordinaire, since then our paths have been somewhat interwoven with me seeming to do most of the weaving, by that I mean driving his broke ass halfway across the country or back. Just a lighthearted dig into his rabbit hole, he pretty much exclusively catches rides already headed that way, plus I would more than happily drop my own quest for knowledge to get him wherever it is he claims to be divinely called to. Even with my deeply ingrained disbelief of anything otherworldly, I must admit he's got some magnetic power that pulls him to and fro, often without him even knowing where or why, then all of a sudden it becomes glaringly apparent and he hops out the passenger door to not be heard from until next year's grand adventure.

He'd be too much to believe if I didn't know him, and too much to take seriously even though I do. I promise his proper

ganders into the world around him and idealized views on how we should live are genuinely him, not some caricature for high brow literature's sake, his philosophies are out there to most but his sincerity brings them all closer to Earth than any other way of life ever could be.

And he really doesn't use any money, like at all, for six or seven years or whatever, and not at all in a way than anyone could ever consider him a bum or a freeloader or anything like that. He's somehow developed a life of momentous living that frees him up to give back far more than he could ever consume, he definitely drinks a lot of coffee though.

You'd never know his wealth by looking at him, tattered and patched and not from a lack of offered apparel but by a commitment to make the most from every thread of another's life. He proudly claims to pass as homeless when he traverses the country until he returns to Asheville where he just looks like he's in a band or something.

He's way too humble to speak of his good side as himself, plus you'd never take his word for it anyway, so take it from me, everything he puts on the page is legit, unless it's one of the made up bits, and even with those there is probably more truth than whatever the editor's opinion would have to say about a suggested rewrite. And if you can't trust this fictional character based on a real character describing the outside of our in-text author as he writes the very book you're reading now, then what are you even doing here?

Just kidding, don't leave, he needs every critic he can get, and besides, I think I've figured out that I'm less a character based on a version of me and more a version of me based on a character, who might also be based on me, or something like that. Either way, I should likely make for a reliably unreliable narrator.

Nice. Now I can finally get some shit done. Successfully suckered this guy into telling my story so I can focus on more interesting topics, like learning how to be a writer. He'll do a

fine job, it's just a low-bar comedy sketch about the end of the world. He gets me in a way that only the altered ego of a split personality could, we share far more philosophies of freedom than I'm capable of capturing in ink, and from most angles he's exceedingly knowledgeable in the real-life circumstances surrounding the broad conceptual misunderstandings I've shaped my entire parade around. And he's a communist.

Not that there is anything wrong with that. I'm not not a communist, or a socialist, or whichever other flavor of favor pools together humanity's quickly dwindling resources, and even further dwindling brainpower, to assemble a half-assed attempt of surviving this thing. I'm certainly no capitalist, and I'm pro worker's rights though I'm more inclined to enlist the help of the unpaid, I find them the most tolerable and with a uniquely flexible schedule.

Where on Earth would one even find such a menagerie of misfits, you ask. How will you convince them to get up and do anything without dangling the rusty keychains of capitalism's stranglehold, you ask. And how will you even eat, you ask.

Except you wouldn't ask any of that. If you've already made it to this page then you either get it or are at least open to getting it. Or you're one of the three who have read all my other books about the same old same old and you're feeling pot-committed to see this trainwreck through. Or you're my mom, hey mom :) Or you've randomly opened to this page in the bookstore to decide if it's worth the bargain bin price they sell these for, almost. Otherwise you would have never gotten this deep in the mud without tossing me aside in frustration and possibly lobbied to reinstitute a book burning policy for the crumbling of my infracted structure and most indefensibly poor writing, but I'm working on that one, remember.

So what else will you ask, you ask. Well, that seems rather pretentious of me to assume the role of reader considering I have already usurped my own narrator's agency, though then again there's no guarantee anyone else will pick up where I left off so perhaps I'll also be my own worst critic, eh, not too bad, I think I'll give it fours stars, but to be fair we should go back and start at the end of the beginning...

Stylish Transient

DJ Rankin

That was your cue, my guy...

“Oh shit,” the narrator stumbles as chip crumbs clutter his oratory ovation, “New to this, sorry.”

He really thought he had more time.

“I really thought I had more time.”

Told you.

“The way that guy goes on and on and goes nowhere of importance gets a little tough to follow, I think I picked up his scent though. No really, his scent, his stitched together pair of two corduroys of which neither have been washed in the last ever, but in his defense he does live in a house made of dirt.

Last time I saw those pants they were a little less wintered, that was in the fall and they were fading quickly even then. He was calling in another favor, although his social credit score seems as bottomless as his duct-taped coffee cup, plus this one wasn't even going on his own tab, the Rock Lady wanted to hop in with the good-time bandwagon destined to rendezvous with the earthhouse season two.

Hardly out of the way, so I swung through Kentucky for a few homemade biscuits and a bit of backwoods banter, that's way too much stuff for you to pack girl, we're only going for a week, I think we will be alright without that case of chili. The rest of the cabin space was jampacked with her endless stream of consciousness until finally she fell out of it and I had some room to reflect on the drive to South Dakota.

UnSheltered Earth, that's what he dubbed his end of this massive undertaking, already organized over fifty volunteers and enough repurposed supplies to build an entire house for five hundred bucks, and all without any digital divisiveness. There is still a website and all that stuff, built it himself with a borrowed computer and stolen wifi, even somehow manages to

update the internet with pictures of progress every couple of weeks. I went out to help last year and haven't been able to get it out of my mind, there ain't no way I'm passing up on working off a little of this colonization I've put on since.

We build earthbag houses, or some call it superadobe, it's pretty much just sandbags filled with dirt and stacked up tight. There is obviously more to it than that, but it would take a lot of effort to sum it up further and I'm actively trying to forget about the drastic amount of physical labor I just resigned to.

We pull into his home away from the home he built away from home, for a homeless person he sure seems to dwell with significantly more structure than he writes. It's the Sun Dance grounds, Harvey's house to be more specific, although *Harvey* is only a made-up moniker to protect from identity theft in the unlikely event that any of these books get picked up by the local authorities. He is a medicine man and Sun Dance chief, one of the few remaining OGs, and somehow this dirt hippie white guy from bumfuck North Carolina has managed to work his way into becoming his right-hand man, or his *helper* as they're called, responsible for tending the fire and aiding with ceremony, hauling wood and cutting grass and cooking soup and always more dishes and pretty much he's the go-to-guy for the whole spiritual community, and that's just his second shift job.

The firekeep's eyes ablaze with delight as he rushes out to greet us, it has been over nine months but the instant we're all together again it feels as if we have been deeply connected this whole time, a familiar sensation that's easy to misplace amid the many miles between us but this moment here and now is undeniably yesterday's tomorrow.

He doesn't carry a phone, can't afford one on his salary, but I've also seen him turn down offers of cellular sponsorship with zero interest and pure principle. It's a convenient tool for keeping tabs on the troops and an easy distraction from a life unexperienced, so he shed it right along with most of the other conveniences of postmodern captivity and exchanged them for a walk most genuine to that voice inside that's hard to hear unless you're on silent. He hasn't yet converted me, though I

am quite jealous of his disconnected connection sometimes, and it is unmistakably evident that he has developed a way to cultivate a level of presence in each and every moment of live interaction as life commands his undivided attention.

So we may not keep in touch when we're out of reach, but when together it's as if we're both the main characters of our ensemble storyline, not simply going through the motions in the background of somebody else's personal memoir.

Good one. I think he's catching on, just mix a bunch of words up in a pot and even the worst cook can get some of it to stick. We should skip a few pages though, he mainly seems to keep droning on about how awesome I am and his memory seems a bit fuzzy around our reunion celebration with Harvey, plus new writers can really run on sometimes it's just better to flip ahead and save you both some embarrassment.

I'd already been on the rez since the spring, splitting time between EarthHouse 55 and Harvey's, plus we also had a Sun Dance in there somewhere too, had hoped this convoy woulda made it for ceremony but Covid locked the wheels, threatened my dance as well but that is a twist for another sideline. He always delivers a ton of wild game, everything from alligator to zoologist, and this time he brought Rocksy, wopila, the only Earthworker who can outdirt me, if I can keep her out of the agates.

We had finished all of the bagwork last year, did the wood construction stuff before Sun Dance, like the door and steps and window, so since then we've just been plugging away on covering it up with cob, a few inches thick, a few long grueling inches thick. They always think it's gonna go so fast with a supercrew, we'll have this thing finished by week's end, two days later they remember that this is a lot of work and start to crumble, except Rocksy, her hernia could be halfway to the ground and she'd still be slinging mud into the sunset and going on and on about nothing at all. We get along well.

There were a few of us regulars in and out of the house by this point, we hadn't built in the second loft or the kitchen yet but it was still getting pretty comfy with plenty of room for heated card games and musical anomalies, which I often won but I'll let him tell you all about that...

Tornado watch this morning, here in the now as I write about before, a serendipitous setting for the deconstruction of our enclosed subject matter, but we're already past that point of return, perhaps Alanis will bless us with another windpipe coincidence worth singing about.

Everybody sings around a bunch at EarthHouse 55, but me, and they'll be singing about the most trivial made-up stuff that happens to catch their short attention span, as dumb as a measly morsel found on the dirt floor, but then it takes a deep left with an upbeat nonchalance spouting off well-manicured philosophies of food waste and tightly knit seeds left leaving the avid listener to decipher the point three ballpoint between genius and madman.

I may not have a voice for the singsong but they're sure to sing my praises after dinner tonight, fireside sushi with some red snapper I caught out of Fukushima's cooling tank. Me and DJ may get entangled in debate over the tiny intricacies of our own approach, but that's only facilitated by the overwhelming likeness in our coalescing worldviews. We are wild boys. We eat from the wild, we live in the wild, we shit in the wild and author-willing we'll die in the wild. We are not some separate element from all-that-ever-was with a soul-purpose of infinite expansion of the human experience, we are but a fingernail on the verge of clawing our way into obsoleteness if we can not prove our worth by strumming at least a few harmonies with the cosmic bass player.

I might not be able to wrap my head around the existence of God in my heart, but there ain't no denying why they call this his country, skylit landscapes for days and a wide-angle nightline starring Orion the Hunter S. Thompson. And this

particular section of land, the ten acres of hillside hayfield chosen as perch for EarthHouse 55, it holds some special kind of serenity unmatched by even the sacred Sun Dance grounds, perhaps an extension of that same commitment to walk in prayer but with even less inside influence to overly confuse the narrative.

A non-mechanical worksite provides a calm canvas for whichever consensual discussion spurs the moment, room to grow as an amplitude of down-to-Earth volumes gain traction by giving way to their own coercive epiphany, each substation performing a minuscule crumble of context but the open space in-between blooms with composite collections of short stories we've convinced ourselves to mean something far greater than the egos who think they composed it.

It is a lot of work, all this monumental extrapolation can really take it out of you, but we've got a supercrew of all-stars, even the Rock Lady's carrying her own weight in agates, we should definitely be done with the cob by the week's end. DJ's been doing most of the mixing with his toes dug in the sand, a barefoot blender transforming a puddle of mud into an artist's rendering of the creator's raw potential, interlaced plotlines of straw tangled in every direction which construct the tensile framework through which the clay is able to glue together the jigsaw grains of time.

The rest of us alternate between prepping buckets of the various ingredients and plastering clumps of sticky icky onto the upper echelon of our life-sized sandcastle. An intuitive carving of your own niche in the process, wet-handed weaving ties the shredded fiber of the next to the last, most work with printless fingertips though Rock Lady's cobknob promises less thumbnail erosion than a fun-filled Saturday night. The art of sculpting more satisfying than the tedious tamping required to erect the double-curvature dome, a simultaneous funnel to the universe and megaphone to the Earth, windproof geometry of a tipi with the energy content of countless crystals, at least if we can stop her from picking all the agates out of the wall.

Three feet dug into the ground, halfway there if anyone wants to quit now, twenty-inch walls coil a thermal container

and next week's water resistant coat should lock in another few months of working weather. It's the perfect temperature in there now, a massload of equilibrium maintains a steady comfort, the automatic thermostat soaks in a day's hard labor. It's called the thermal flywheel effect, it takes twelve hours for the sun's radiation to penetrate the shell, by which time the babies inside welcome something warm to nuzzle up to. And after an evening of chilling, the solar heatsink has blown its load and it's back to the cooling-off chamber for another hot one.

Nearly worked up an appetite after all that, wonder if anyone would notice if I quit early to start dinner, probably gonna take a while to not cook an entire feast. Burning pallets light the spicy snapper, next year's excavation underway for an ever-evolving firepit of proportional magnitude, it's nearly impossible to not have a good time with this revolving cast of radicals. Early retirement contagious until cocoons are pried open for a much anticipated tournament of champions, nertz! And there you have it ladies and gentlemen, I win yet again while your infallible hero struggles to find a corner to curl up in the dirt.

Nope. No no no. It absolutely did not happen that way. That little dickfart fuckface got cross-wired and thought he could pull one over on my faithful readership. You should be offended. In fact, you are offended, I would imagine, why who wouldn't be offended by such sophomoric morosity disguising himself as a literate fictionist. Jokes on you pal, you've got no idea that I've been writing about you this whole time, and his story is historically written by the victor so better get with the program lest you find yourself under a study hall of justice of the peace of mind your Ps and Qs cause R U ready to rumble? I think not.

A meta-nonfictional self-awareness run amok, B-story characters cluing into their own existence as DJ looks up and acknowledges the very creator of his own universe, good one.

Unlocked understanding that we're just vessels for the Great Spirit as they channel their experience, our experience, every character's experience uniquely their own but also intricately knotted with the whole of creation. Same raw energy poured through individual filters, but obviously written by the same pen, similarities far outweigh the subtle nuance of altered ego.

To wake up and see the bigger picture one must merely open themselves to the creator's flow, let thy hollow bone act as conduit of life immortal.

We have the free will to listen or to not. In times that it becomes hard to hear, we have the free will to quiet our mind and foster connection with the cosmos, or we can succumb to the incredible attention to detail our omnipresent author put into world-building as we get ourselves lost in the funhouse. Either choice can be enriching to the overall storyline, perhaps cringeworthy at times as a character who thinks they're the author tries to force feed a far-fetched narrative that simply doesn't track, but rest assured that from a perspective beyond the page they have a pretty good idea how un-loose-endedly it's all going to come together, without having to know jack shit about how we're gonna manage to get us there.

So, short story long, might be about time to buckle down because I've literally driven cars until the wheels fell off, on the way to Sun Dance, so don't think I'm not willing to take out a bridge or two if they get in the way of my upstream migration. And little does he know that he'll be under my magnifying glass with just enough rope to get burned...

So, my major takeaway was that now DJ's talking about himself in the third person, yet I'm the one stepping outside myself. And yeah, of course I know he's been writing about me, he leaves his notebook sitting right there on the table like a big pleather-bound look-at-me, I'm so productive, look what I can do to save the world, except any idiot can write a book, how clever, how about go save a turtle and then maybe you'll have something worth its weight in self-gratification.

And as for the card game, yeah he won, he always wins, it's pretty sickening to tell you the truth, and in the off-chance that someone else gets close to clenching he just kicks it into high gear and rubs it in that he wasn't even trying the entire time. He showed us this stupid speed battle solitaire game and it's been the bane of my self-reflexive existence ever since.

"That's the one he taught us during all the tornado stuff, innit?"

What? What even is this? I thought I was holding the feather and leading the witness, how is it the Rock Lady's edging in wordwise?

"Dunno. But we all know that once I've got the mic I'm probably pulling a Mike and spilling my guts until my hernia can't take it anymore."

"So then he said, *'I've got cats,'*" she said. "So he drives home on what seemed like the perfect sunny day, some dark clouds in the distance but that's whatever, goes inside, pets the kitties and he's gotta take a big ol' dook, so he's sitting there, right, butt-naked for some reason, don't ask me why, and he starts to hear some kind of commotion outside, *'Those fucking cats,'* he said, so now he's flailing around butt-naked on the toilet, don't ask me why, using one hand to open and slam the cabinet door to out-racket the racket while the other is clutching his poo knife waving it around with empty threats of stirfry and all the while he's yelling *'Shut the fuck up you fucking cats.'* I mean, he loves the cats, *'I do, I really do,'* but these are just the outside cats, sure he still feeds the whole neighborhood of strays spiraling around the porch but they hadn't worked their way inside yet, well a couple had, they just ran inside one day and dug so deep into his piles of music memorabilia that they live there now and only creep out once he's sound asleep, way too much racket for that now though, couldn't even take a shit in peace, and then it all of a sudden got quiet again. *'Finally,'* he said and yelled back, *'I'm gonna take my sweet ass time but when I get done I'm coming out*

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