

Excerpted from **HIGH FIVE FOR RAM DASS** (a work in progress)

HARRIET "HARRY" DODGE

BOOK 1

"Two of the members are stuck down a hole." Asia has been sent back to find us, perhaps a day and a half behind Group 1. She emerges from a patch of Palo Verde and skips the last few feet down into the wash. We are surrounded by grey rocks the size of brontosaurus testicles. My ankles are weak. "The Neils think you are the only one who can get him out." I hate all the Neils. Smug, I hate smug. I would never ever name a person Neil after this experience.

Marx the Authoritarian is whimpering by the time I arrive. I guess smack dab in the middle of clubbing a squirrel to death, he started an allergic reaction to an unripe prickly pear they had just finished brunching on. With a muted snap, his epiglottal appendage had very suddenly inflamed to the size of a ping pong ball. Presumably, he reeled, lost his footing and was hurled into the old well. As an aside, at approximately 29 inches in

diameter it was a ridiculously tight opening and had to have been excavated initially by a real lazy motherfucker.

I notice a trio of scavengers have dragged a small set of bleachers over and I suppose people will be making themselves at home for the duration of the spectacle. One of Marx the Authoritarian's legs is underneath him touching the floor of the damp trap, and one leg is straight above him. His knee is pressing into his throat "really really hard!" he yells up, but his allergic reaction has subsequently reversed itself. And again, I'm not sure how Sabbath died and then got down there on top of him.

"Air Supply, is that you buddy?" The length of the cave actually amplifies his voice. The voice of the clumsy spelunker. "I hope to God that it's you." I can hear that he is drooling.

I get down on all my knees, put my cheek to the warm dirt around the rim of the loamy ventricle. "You've been off-kilter lately," I

murmur. I know he can hear me perfectly. A dense hush settles onto the bleachers.

“What? Shit. I’m totally smashed in here man!” His voice cracks. I sit up for a moment and concentrate on a set of deep amber buttes way off to my right. I narrow my eyes at the Neils, who are all puckered together in the front row. M the A is crying now. Apparently subsumed by a panic that strikes me and most of the other people on the bleachers as unattractive. Where was my sportsmanship now? Beyond my control was the urge to crap down the hole instead of just jettison my garbage thoughts.

•••

Having been on the land the longest (by my count) I was both respected and regarded with suspicion. I had managed to become an outsider among the outsiders (while living outside). Bruised with the psychic arrows discharged continually by the lingering specter of youth culture (you can take the young out of culture...), I inarguably remained... a being diminutive in physical stature and, more to the point, fundamentally narrow. I also had long hairs that protruded idiotically from both of my nostrils. For these reasons and some others I will refrain from mentioning, I was therefore best qualified for the dangerous mission that was to follow.

“Spirituality is a mean nasty chicken snatcher,” I said down the hole. “Spirituality,” I tilted my head away from the earthy orifice in a covert address to the remaining bystanders, “no matter how softy soft you think it is—steals the marvelous from the physical world.” I was totally off the point and I knew it. A renewed round of sobs arose from the soggy grotto.

“What are you driving at, Air Supply?!” His cries sounded like a dog yelping. I felt like killing him.

“Let’s eat him after you pull him up,” Neil Sedaka suggested. His tiny flipper fings

wriggled almost imperceptibly just off his clavicle.

Neil Sedaka. There was a guy whose surgery had gone well. Amputations, reductions, substitutions were now substantially more commonplace than, say, five years ago. I think in lieu of the lobotomy for lingual excision, aerodynamism was compelling to pretty much everyone who ended up becoming a member. Helen Reddy had once described a related mindset that materialized just after the millenium. They started calling it body integrity identity disorder. Where a person requests an amputation. They have a mulish desire for their body to physically match the idealized image they have of themselves. A very spicy paradox, the idea of losing one or more major limbs on the road to becoming whole. “Less is more,” Helen Reddy had chortled. Chicago was always calling it Modernism and then farting.

BOOK 2

Shortly after I was able to sit up, my mother strapped me to my potty seat and left me there for just over three years. I still have callouses on the back of my thighs to prove it. She managed to feed me now and then, empty the bowl on most days, and wipe me down biennially, but she never said a damn thing in my direction. I was just like a little tunnel. Respirating. Memorizing the lines of the dim doorway, the knob, a glowing yellow shade over my left shoulder. Sometimes I heard her crying, padding around in her slippers, one day she killed a cat in the downstairs foyer. City workers eventually found me there, a little filthy pink Rodin, pooping. I was real skinny. At that point—so the story goes— I wanted to know the words for everything. Humans are funny and stupid. Why would I want to know the words for anything? We have like cookie cutters instead of brains.

I met my one good friend at the Agency though. There were a lot of feral kids there, or partially feral, but the best one was a kid they rescued off a Patagonian plateau a few years before. He had been in the wilderness there since he was four and half, tending sheep. Enslaved, apparently, and neglected. He never really cared to speak, was barely managing his daily chorus “I’d gladly go back” over a late lunch one day when he keeled over of a brain aneurysm. I tried to help him, but I thought he was choking on a french fry and was way into the heimlich thing when the EMTs showed up and noticed the blood balloon forming on the side of his tender eager little enslaved head. I miss him though, don’t get me wrong. I can still hear his tiny whispering mantra. Probably he’s why I ended up on this land, trying to figure out how to get Marx the Authoritarian out of his hole.

I started submitting articles to the Food Insects Newsletter and the Society for Primitive Technology at the age of 13. The first one was called Hunter Gatherers Were Sometimes Very Labor-Efficient. The second one, Collecting Ant Pupae For Food. At sixteen I submitted an incisive piece entitled *They Ate What!?* in italics with a question mark and exclamation point. There were too many to name. My annual Food Insect Festivals of North America garnered me the coveted Leppy in 1989 and Fried Grasshoppers For Campouts Or At Home is to date the one of which I am most proud.

My preludial phases are most effectively characterized by the sentence fragment that follows, “A bunch of ass-eating jumbos.” The assorted biological anti-fruits of my failed gene enhancements are—however—at this juncture quite striking and—I have to admit—have garnered a certain amount of praise and/or erotic attention. Chicks dig me. Life as an earthling without outer ear cones, less one arm, and with three spindly

little brittle-boned birdlegs has not been as wholly joyless as one (not in the know) may imagine. There are thousands of us. Narrows we’re called. Our bodies are more cylindrical (although the difference is negligible and for the most part imperceptible), and our ribs are very flexible. When it counts, I can fit into places that are most certainly a pretty tight squeeze for the old guard.

BOOK 3

We are allowed to bring five pounds in with us. Like heredity. Where you show up with a certain load. Primeval gifts we give ourselves. I bring in a very lightweight sleeping bag that frays and disintegrates over the course of my first week. In addition I bring in a stack of pornography which comes in handy as a blanket until I perfect the employment of pine boughs, coal beds and various terrain appropriate shelters.

Chicago, Asia, Fleetwood Mac. We are all given soft rock names as we arrive. The goal is a resynthesis of the worst of contemporary culture. Vaccinations. Sometimes someone gets the name of a person who didn’t do soft rock. One guy got the name Lee Iacocca and another guy, his lover who they came at the same time got Simon Wincer, who directed *Free Willy in 1993*. *No one on the land knows who the original Simon Wincer is but Simon Wincer the guy from our group feels okay even not having a famous name to live out the rest of his days with. Another guy got the name Marx the Authoritarian. Which I thought was nice cuz it rhymed with Conan the Barbarian. He was just a little guy though, like me. He was really nice and kind of wispy.*

There’s only been one baby born into the community, Eagles and Beegees had a perfect little hermaphrodite which they called The Brown Dwarf. Brown dwarfs are this type of star in actual outer space that never lit on fire. They have a lot of mass but not

enough to create the explosion that would light them up. So they account for some of the mass or gravity that certain near galaxies exert but we have no way of seeing them because they do not emit light. They apparently have a sucking capability that does not rival a black hole. It is a brown dwarf. A mysterious blob of as yet primordial ooze. Awaiting assignment. Like universal stem cells.

...

Once a week Neil Sedaka goes out and liberates a capitalist. We roast him whole like the pig he is with an apple in his mouth and then eat him without using our hands. Again the idea is unification, wholeness (so we don't disassemble the corpse) and also some hair of the dog stuff to keep us on our toes. We do this weekly, did I say that, and while we eat, we chant UNIGUY, UNIGUY. Shim's our mascot. A human version of the absolute. A being with just a body, no appendages or holes at all. I think of him like a cross between Casper the Ghost and an octopus. I don't know why. We trance out during these group be-ins. I like it a lot.

...

I happen to know that pretty much all matter is made out of the same stuff. These tiny little things called strange, charm and neutrinos. Objects and organisms just form and reform out of the ooze. There are certain particles that are especially attracted to other particles so that's why certain forms are really common as far as the observable universe. Like iron, the whole core of the earth is a hard iron ball and then a bunch of liquid iron around it. And hydrogen is the most common. That's what most of the stars are eating. Ninety-two percent of everything is hydrogen. It weighs ONE. A lot of people have done research around why for example humans don't just fall into a pile of iron and

hydrogen. It's cuz we're in a struggle with the sun's heat apparently. The organism stays organized as long as it has a task. If I had to make a molecule out of humans.... Ram Dass would be the proton, Barbra Streisand would be the electron, and Ted Kaczynsky as the neutron.

In moments of glee members will often yell out, "High five for Ram Dass!" and slap hands about face level. It is not that high of a five. This salutation is apparently particular to this land and this membership. They were doing it pretty often even on the very first day I arrived.

BOOK 4

I address the slimy aperture. "You're going to have to gnaw the limbs off of Sabbath's torso. It looks from here like he's just in a big weird tangle." No response. I scratch my balls and listen for any signs of morbidity. Pull my loincloth out of my ass crack.

I hear high-pitched whining. Fast mindless breaths. He is using up air.

"The exploited and dispossessed of this world can no longer seriously desire to get a piece of this putrefying pie, nor to take it over and 'self-manage' it!" I drone into the orifice earnestly. Behind me a tired voice, "Right on buddy."

I sprinkle a bit of soil onto the fleshy blockage. "Why'd you contact press?"

"So we can get more members. So people would know!" Strained, macho delivery.

"Listen up. If my solidarity with certain actions is critical it's because I can see calculation creeping in. If I reject all cooperation with the media it's because that power structure demands those who choose to participate in its activity to suddenly measure their words, drain them of substance, of the energy force that refuses all compromise!"

Growls from below. Humming.

...

Of late there's been mild divisions occurring in the community. There are the stone agers (stoners), the postindustrial scavengers (scabs), and a few of just your basic sort medieval barbarians whom we affectionately call Streisand. The scavengers have widened their foraging goals to include bits of plastic, metal, wood siding, car parts, synthetic drugs, pornography. They're generally a lot more angry than the stoners. They don't seem to have any hope. I can never tell if they're scabs cuz they have no hope or they have no hope cuz they're scabs. They always strike me as without core, low on will and willpower.

Over at the bleachers some of the folks have broken off into effervescent trios and commenced to some serious butt sniffing. It seems invariably headed to a some sort of coital feral flurry and I am melancholy about having to miss out on it.

"Stupid fucking purist troglodyte..." He continues to manifest an inky brattish courage that for some reason reminds me of that popline down a shrimp.

"You're just a fucking essentialist," he adds.

"I am not!" I say and pop my finger out of my ass. "I'm the opposite!" That M the A is revealing a truer bourbonism than I have previously identified in him.

"There is no such thing as human nature..." He runs out of breath, sucks the heavy air back into his lungs and continues. "You idiot! There *is* no ONE truth." I finger my armpit hair casually.

"The things that are true are the *things that are true*, buddy. Just cuz you don't know what they are doesn't mean they don't exist!!"

"What good is a thing that is unknowable?" he exhorts.

"Not sure. But on the same arm, what good is a thing that is knowable?" Silence from below.

"Tell me something good member. Did you like the feeling of the cookie cutter when it came?"

He is unrepentant. "I did, Air Supply. I DID."

"Well, I DID NOT, pal. I didn't." Long pause. We had finished simultaneously.

He is crying quietly. "I'm scared, Air Supply, please pull me out."

Silence.

...

Chuck Mangione, Late Zeppelin and a Streisand are stuffed under the bleachers in a throbbing gyroscopic heap. Late Zeppelin's head is banging into the aluminum bench at a pace that makes me feel like doing "The Bus Stop." I watch them for a long minute and the crickets rev up their nighttime callypso. Buttes the color of ash and pumpkin ascend until mercifully, they eclipse the sun. A totally relaxing primal event. I feel looser. The air is soft, exactly the temperature of my skin and fragrant to boot. Orange blossoms. Tuna. Whimpers, screams, yells replace the metallic fuck-gonging and before long the trio emerges into the soft dark night smiling. Stumbling on loose hips.

I soften considerably. "All right people, get the winch. Tell the other Neils to bring the truck." I take a couple of steps and notice Poco—whose penis is pushed into his body like a vagina—growl and snap the little fucker back out to a sproingy seven incher with the aid of a handmade bladder. I stop in my tracks.

"Hold on Neil, forget the winch, let's make some cordage. Tell Gianni to kill a few squirrels. We don't have a lot of time."

BOOK 5

The tinder bundle is made from any kind of dry fibrous materials like dead grass. Doobie Bros, Sonny and Cher, Ambrosia and

the rest of the members start drifting into Meat Mecca for the LCD (Liberated Capitalist Dinner). I pick around behind a patch of smoke trees, find a couple of twigs. I notice Chuck Mangione looking at me out of the corner of her one good eye.

Back at the pit I get everything set up, make a bow, press the socket into the spindle and hold it with my mouth. Then back and forth. I don't rush. After a few minutes smoke starts rising from the bark. Chuck is actually smirking at this point, intently focused on my activity. Slowly, gently, I pull the board away from the bark, wave my hand over the dust and there it is, the red-orange glow of a firebead. I see Chuck Mangione through the haze of my handiwork. She winks and pokes her tongue out between the left part of her lips.

I happen to know she has part of her face that is motionless now and it will be like that for the rest of her days. The paralysis is from an old sex act injury where she collapsed of ecstasy in a standing bondage position, the collar had tightened around her neck while the person in charge of the whole thing was taking a whiz. Basically, she didn't get enough air for a few minutes one night. Her sidesmile is absolutely enchanting, though, and the long auburn curls that cascade down her back like seventy-seven waterfalls are just too much for my little body to bear. I smile back.

I cup the bundle and blow into it from underneath. One, two, three and boom, it bursts into flame right in the palm of my hand. Everyone cheers. I have created life and energy and I feel good.

We have stuffed the LC with a combination of mealworms, grasshoppers, cattail roots and mustard. His hands are starting to look a little bloated and I am relieved when we finally get him over the fire. The meal is protein heavy but most of us are a little light on our feet so it never hurts. After eating

and UNIGUY chanting, I walk over and find Chuck Mangione. She's laughing with U2 who is now wearing the meat corpse's shirt. It is mostly frowned on to pilfer the civ-wear from the meat corpses but in this case we could all see the draw. Tie dye looked pretty decent on U2. In a soft way. I don't think anyone else could have pulled it off.

I kick the warm dirt. Toe a very small fragment of what appears to be colon tissue in a move that I hope comes off as humble, eager.

At a loss for propositional technical terms, I hasten a shot. "I like your fur." I poke at her hair. "Would you like to get funky with me?"

"She's a lesbian!" U2 sneers in a really nerdy voice and then cackles loudly. Chuck holds my gaze. That sidesmile is really a star up close.

"You know there's no real genders anymore," I continue.

"Yeah, I know." Her left eye is unswerving.

"Plus, my dick is so small you might mistake it for a clitoris. You wouldn't be the first."

"A micro-penis," she purrs. "That's sexy."

"I'm not kidding." I kick into bachman turner overdrive and we both start to walk at the same time.

"Yeah, and you could fly a 747 into my ass opening too..."

If she had two sides to her mouth they would definitely have collaborated on this particular grin. I kiss her on the the motionless little flap of skin that is her right eyelid.

"Get America and Spyro Gyra into the Haystack Hut in half an hour. You'll each lose a forearm up there before you can say 'Bakunin's Revenge.'" Bakunin's Revenge is what the group calls it when a member is constipated. No one says it outright but slowness is considered a sign of faintness of

heart. Lack of feral primacy, rewilding ambition. I'm proud to say I never have suffered from it.

...

I get over to the Roadkill Rapprochement just before she does and load up on what we call bacon fat. It's actually CEO drippings. From when we happene to liberate a CEO. And if you just want to use it as personal lubricant, it "stays good" for up to four months. In a penicillin sort of way.

Chuck Mangione shows up a few minutes late with Pablo Cruise and Joe Cocker. This really burns me up for a long minute. We whisper-argue like eviscerated rubber chickens.

"I didn't say you could bring just *anyone!* Pablo Cruise and Joe Cocker??" I feel totally dirty.

"Well, Air Supply, they think you're sexy." She pauses a beat for dramatic effect. "So." She sucks her good cheek into her teeth.

I abdicate. "You know the rules, though, nothing divisible by two."

So Joe Cocker watches while we get off. Concentrically abiding the mandate that we disavow his pleasure in the creation of ours. I'll just say right here that the three of us do absolutely everything that any body can do to another body. And we do it TWICE. Pablo Cruise in particular is creative. Marsupial such that takes my breath away. Shim is a nasty little pachyderm. Not trendy at all.

BOOK 6

We have managed to tack together a half-mile length of dried buck guts, and water from the creek is now flowing freely into the skinny terrestrial blowhole. Marx the Authoritarian remains unconvinced regarding the efficacy of this particular succession of experiments and is letting loose a string of shrieks that serve only to fuel the burgeon-

ing disdain we are all struggling to quash. Poco and Asia are manically addressing any number of small leaks with a quick-dry sap and blood paste that Joe Wheelie had showed me in the initial days of my membership.

"Tie this to Sabbath's hair!" I drop down a boingy bladder balloon. It descends with a series of whispery boms and comes to rest on the gangrenous clot that had been gentle Sabbath.

BOOK 7

Later that night I wake up to the sound of heckling. ELO and Genesis are raking Late Zeppelin over the coals.

"You can't do meth on the land, man!" They are both yelling at once. "That's EXCESS, dude. Accumulation."

I see what they are freaking out about. There's a pile of berries about the size of a Volkswagen van just beyond the Coal Bed Corral.

"If we keep that shit we're for sure going straight to hell."

Late Zeppelin stares at his handiwork, a tremolo in his voice. "Babylon man. I get it." He's trying to let them know that he knows it is wrong. That he is getting their point. "Can we make preserves or something?"

You can tell he feels bad and is in a place where he doesn't have control over his drug use. He's probably just on the land with us as a way to not get picked up by the 5-0 which is fine in a totally understandable awesome way, but which is often an all-too-diaphanous layer which falls away to reveal a stark ambivalence regarding the goals of rewilding.

Rewilding isn't a cakewalk you know. And Late Zeppelin is finding that out. Behind the monolith of his drug use is a very smart guy. I personally know that he once had been marooned on a desert island with a nurse and a bunch of kids. They were liter-

ally dying of thirst. Off the top of his head he thought up the idea of filtering salt water through his rectum. Like an inverted or at least internal coffee filter of sorts. It worked. He was a survivor. A survivalist. I could no longer organize the difference in my mind. Which was melty on a clear day and kaleidoscopic on most.

I stop listening and decide to go over and see Lee Iacocca and Simon Wincer. They've been perfecting a method of PM hookless fishing. Giant paleozoic catfish is a great break from roadkill and I am definitely on board with the ongoing cultivation of any and all of the johnny-come-lately earth skills. This maneuver strikes me time and again as magnificently spartan, though I have personally avoided subjecting myself to the mild pain that apparently accompanies the almost static hunt.

A member wades quietly into the silty pool which is steep-sided if not shallow and rife with horizontal orifices just about the size of a pudgy human leg. Kind of like an underwater adobe village. Shim chooses a cavity, pushes an entire arm into it and waits for the cumbrous feline mariner to note the sudden company of a stumpy pink eel. Before long one's arm is suddenly and violently engulfed by the fishy corpus. At this point in the conjugation it is imperative that the soggy angler tickle the fish's butt from inside. Normally a slight flex in the pointer finger does the job. Hundreds of tiny, razor teeth subsequently jab into the bracelet of skin just above the forearm. Boom. Pull 'em out, wrestle 'em onto the shore and have the land guy club the ugly motherfucker asap. These were weird formless things. Wide with big rubbery whiskers.

There was a guy who had initiated the hook free fishing (that's how Simon and Lee got in on it) but last month the fishing guy, his name was Foghat but for some reason we called him Tigger. Anyway, his coal bed was

way too hot one night and he just fried himself almost to death. In the morning, he was only like half gone but we sort of mobbed it up and put him out of his misery. It wasn't even like a vote. We don't really vote on stuff here, just feel vibes. The vibe on that morning was, "Let's eat the motherfucker." That's just how it went. I don't know. The sun wasn't even up yet when it happened.

...

I am in wash with gentle hills on all sides, lots of empty, wildflower-covered fields. I walk a couple of miles to the river and then haul myself onto the dale near the peat bog. It is pitch black with no moon and I consistently hear wildlife scurrying as I approach their hiding spots. Several deer bound across a field and many ducks take off from a spring-fed pond on my right.

I think more about my upcoming lobotomy. I can't wait to really break with civilization. I feel more than a little regretful (or angry I guess more like) that I have been taught the names for everything. That I had been such an awesome speller as a kid. In fifth grade when we graphed sentences I had been the only person in class to follow the lesson. I was regretful cuz I was probably going to toss in a certain amount of intuition with my language lobes. I guess they're on separate sides of the brain, but you never know. I'm humble regarding the scope of my senses. My understanding of nature. Our consciousnesses made of matter and then convinced that they are not. We are arrogant, insist even as we die in droves of cancer and hurricanes that we are at the top of the food chain. We then, completely baffled about the issue of infinity. It so clearly exists as in the case of the universe, but even the poor cosmologists will acknowledge that as soon as we learn our first word, we may as well kiss the universe goodbye. Scale problems. Magnitude impossibilities. You can't know

WORDS *and* the shape of the universe.

It is a beautiful walk. I struggle up the bajada and make it onto the mesa without twisting any of my ankles. My feet are narrow, have been designed after bird bones, for an awesome weight to strength ratio. I am tripod-like though so I am actually ON each foot for less time than any of the bipeds. The little cheeses I call feet rarely ache, but I do twist my ankles a lot.

I get over there and coincidentally Dire Straits is standing on shore wearing nothing but a jockstrap and he has an old TV strapped to his waist. There is a long squiggly rough mud track from where he has dragged the old machine in with him. The light from the moon glistens, reflecting off little drops of blood starting to form at the apex of his hip bone plates. His lobotomy seems to be working out. He is pretty much the coolest member. I nod to him. He exhales quite audibly through his nose, smiling with only the corners of his sweet eyes. I walk over and hug him. After a moment, he actually wraps his skinny arms quite surely around my melancholic little torso. At that point, I decide to press the clan for post-lobotomy title changes. It only seems right that if you have had culture removed from your consciousness that you be no longer required to wear it daily, an emblem of your tubercular history. Like Hester Prynne and her scarlet letter. I want to call him Wolf. Or just like, a grunty *huff!* *With two exclamation points. I want to change his name to Wolf or Lava Bomb.*

Lee Iaccoca and Simon Wincer are nowhere around so I decide to keep on. I realize right then that Dire Wolf is beyond names. He is the shape of the universe now and all the ooze it contains. Totally unnamable. I pull a joint out of my loincloth and smoke it as I walk.

Yanni—who walks around with a picture of an asshole taped over his left eye—had

taken his ultralight up just before he came onto the land about five years ago. Dropped a bunch of sativa cuttings. Thousands of seedlings, so we were basically baked about seventy-five percent of the time. It didn't officially count as agriculture cuz it was out of our hands, figuratively.

I had passed a bunch of wild onions, dotted in with glacier lilies near the creek, so I head back to pick some up for breakfast. Once I get to the creek I stretch out and try to nap but then lie there, looking at the clouds move in the night sky. I hock a loogie up into the space above my face, a rotating nebula, phlegm in the shape of the universe. I open my mouth as wide as it will go, intending a retrieval of the fluid, but it misses my straining yaw and lands as usual on the rock next to my earhole. I do this enough times before sleep overtakes me that the back of my hair is still wet and musky when I get up. I dream that I am a clown, I dance, I tell Irish alcoholic jokes to people at bat mitzvahs.