



Big

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Adventure

Dr Stephen Hoppo Hopkins

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Dr Hoppo's Big Adventure is a semi-fictionalised autobiography. The names of some of the characters have been changed in order to protect their privacy. Other characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Zero: Origins

An email, year 2000 AD:

Hi Tim,

Picking up the thread after Camden Jazz Palace... As you said, Robin Jones and King Salsa are a great band but I agree it was a shame to have to stand up all night like so many squashed sardines. Poor Rosemary and her bad back! I hope she recovered OK.

It's brilliant that Bruce put us in touch again after so many years – I thought you'd disappeared from the scene entirely. As well as being a pleasure to meet again...it was also a great relief! I felt surprisingly nervous as the tube approached Embankment for our reunion. My dear-observant-wife-who-knows-me-so-well insisted on pointing out the tell-tale signs: my strained voice and flecked dry mouth. Bah! Must I be so transparent?

More to the point, why the nerves? The following (many) words will hopefully tell...

Yes! I finally got around to compiling the promised list of some of the '**unexplained incidents**' from our dim and distant past – other-worldly incidents that I do not yet entirely understand, and on which you may be able to shed some light. Unfortunately, the short email that I intended has gradually morphed into a mini-epic - it's not as if I have much else to do these cold nights stuck in deepest Brighton suburbia. I found that I enjoyed the writing process, and the more I wrote, the more I remembered.

Hence the specific 'incidents' are now interleaved between other stories from those interesting times (attached as a separate doc). I've done my best to recount them in the order in which they actually happened, and I've also **highlighted them** as they appear. I'm really looking forward to getting your take on it all – what was really going on back then?

As you asked, I did not copy this to your work email – I wouldn't want to tarnish your reputation at Canary Wharf, just in case they spy on your email! Otherwise, since we met, I've been 'commuting' (which sounds rather fancy) to Mcr some weekends, or alternately Emma comes down to Brighton. She's just returned North for her busy exam period, so I am available over the next fortnight for walking in the Downs as discussed. Or will we be swimming? - I refer to the recent floods!

It is curious to have left these incidents unexplored, with so many questions unanswered for so long - thirty years in fact, but then again.... the search for the bluebird of happiness must go on.

Best wishes,
Steve H

One: Tunnel Vision

'Unexplained incident one': December 1969

From the periphery of my vision, all around me, the dark velvet tunnel opened and beckoned me forward. Gentle, pulsing peristaltic waves pulled my vision into the distant centre where flowing lines of perspective gathered. Familiar, this. The spot of light in the far, far abyss. It was time to take the first faltering steps into the murk. The grass crunched under my desert boots as they shattered a thousand scintillating ice crystals into pastel music, instantly connecting ears and boots. 'Ears and boots'. That's funny I laughed quietly. Oh shit, my eyes have shut again. "Opening eyes now, captain". Swirls of opalescent, condensing breath in happy sympathy with the rhythmic footsteps. It must be really cold out there. Right. Concentrate. "Pull yourselves together, men". Walking steadily forward now, eyes open, fixed on the distant glow. What or who will it be this time around? Nervous sniggle¹.

The tunnel, like all things, was alive, breathing, and intent upon manifesting a mirror-like symmetry. Its midpoint was at the limit of my vision in front, and beyond that, ah yes, the reflection of myself walking steadfastly towards myself walking towards myself. I can make out the movement now, a sense of a swaying gait, scarecrow fabric flapping in the wind, but somehow spindly too. Oh bugger, a skeleton, now it's grinning wide and flailing its arms in an attempt at danse macabre. Ha ha ha, but I'm not fooled. How corny, a floating bag of bones, myself as death! Pull the other one! And anyway, a real undead corpse would look directly at me, not make those almost flirtatious, jerky, sideways glances. And those arm movements look like a puppet show. Try again, deadhead!

Metamorphosis is the natural way of this realm I had chosen to enter, and as I walked forward into the all-embracing tunnel, the dancing shape grew larger. At fifty paces, it was clearly a human shape-shifter, cleverly clothing itself with a swift succession of holograms, both familiar, archetypal, yet curiously deadpan: the pale-faced Japanese actor in black robes, the aborigine warrior with spear and shark-tooth necklace, the leper princess swathed in green layers, the faceless monk with cowl. Et cetera. They came towards me from the ever-nearing, hazy mirror, a living slideshow of Jungian archetypes at once impressive in their detailed representation but simultaneously prosaic and lacklustre in their motivation. Frankly, I was a tad disappointed, being all geared up for a life-changing experience.

Whereupon the show froze on a Red Indian figure, stony faced as a totem pole. "Keep moving men," I commanded my inner self, bolstered by the spirit of Captain Mannering, quickening my pace towards the pole, which suddenly burst apart at the seams and out stepped, oh corniest of cornies, oh yes, none other than Frankenstein himself. His eyes took in his surroundings, swivelled round upon me like vicious searchlights. He hurtled

¹ A small giggle

at me, six foot eight inches tall in his boots, complete with ragged-rotten olive skin, and fresh, suppurating stitches and a large iron bolt through the neck. He was truly alive and real, the previous dried, flat skins just a clever ploy to lure me nearer. Wow, I thought, this is a major hallucination. Piercing green light flashed from behind the eyes of Frankenstein, his furious thought forms instantly conveying to me the pent-up anger of a misunderstood being who had not asked to be created. Born only to suffer.

For a few short sweet fearful moments, the power of the twin green eye-lights blew away my doubt. There truly is a creature Frankenstein, he 'lives', he is here now, he is beautiful in his ugly pain, and he is about to strangle me to death. Suspension of disbelief. And delightful terror. Oh, but sweet Jesus, it's only Finbar. I tried to make myself see Finbar, to wipe away the living (uh, sorry, dead) flesh with which my errant mind had clothed him. To no avail. "Don't know no Finbar", said the searing eye beams directed telepathically into my cortex. "Frankenstein's the name." The monster, now at arm's length, reached out towards his victim. I could smell the formaldehyde and daffodils. I knelt, feeling faint. Oh fuck, the bright moon silhouettes his head, where fresh blood is gleaming on the leathery stitchwork. I wasn't expecting to die this very night.

"You all right?" It was Barry's friendly and familiar voice. I looked up. Frankenstein had evaporated back into the mists that hung around in the field. My schoolfriend Finbar (alias Barry, alias Finbar) stood there in his army greatcoat, his smiling face showing fleeting kind concern before he, guffawing politely, enquired..."bad trip or what, man?"

"No, nothing like that. Fuck, that was pretty good. Had a powerful hallucination that you were Frankenstein. Quite frightening for a moment, in a Hammer horror sort of way".

It was a game Finbar and I had just invented to try and liven up yet another sub-strength acid trip. We went to opposite ends of the starlit field in the local park, and then walked towards each other in the misty, mind-warped twilight. A glimmer of a hallucination would usually begin at fifty paces. On a lucky run, as we converged on each other, the hallucination would strengthen until it became absolutely real under the combined creative forces of the subconscious, the darkness and the diethylamide. Barry (as I mainly called him), or Finbar (as his family always called him) once saw me as Munch's "The Scream" - it was that kind of friendship. I admired him enough to let him get away with two names. But then again, I was sometimes Steve, sometimes Hoppo.

"I didn't get much that time.... the usual skeletons and Buddhist monks.... always wagging their fingers at me as if they know something I don't, or," he jibed, "is that your personality coming through?"

I affected a look of annoyance and wagged my finger. Up to that point, the highlight of the trip for me had been a tree in the middle of our favourite field. A distant genetic relative that under the hallucinatory powers of LSD had metamorphosed into a sacred font of life from the Garden of Eden, bearing in her branches many fruits with the shape of women's breasts, both maternal and gently erotic, but mainly reminiscent of large green mangos with nipples. Having experience of only this one sylvan spirit, I wondered if this

femininity was common to all trees or just this species, or just this tree. And I still do, today. Oughta revisit that tree some day and say hello...if I can find it.

"Well, this stuff is alright in a relative kind of way," continued Barry, "but it's shite acid compared to the Blue Velvet I had last month at Essex....that's completely mind-blowing...you know...can't move for six hours...totally gone in Leary's inner spaces.... what we could do with right now is a bit of a blow to give the acid a boost."

"Yeah, I'm dry myself, apart from this last joint I pre-rolled for tonight". I proudly produced a three-skiner from my breast pocket. "Nice one". "Weedy kif, I'm afraid. Tried to score from Adrian a few days ago, but he only had some shitty Lebanese. Not worth buying."

"Oh, I don't know. It's quite nice for coming down, you know... quite mild, smooths away the jangles. There's no chance of sleeping for a few hours, I wouldn't mind some right now."

"Well. It's frigging cold here, but I don't really want to go back to my folks yet, I'm still too spaced to handle my parents, they might be still up... I've just had a crazy idea. Maybe Tim Jordan's got some hash, he lives near here."

"Far out. Do you know him well enough?"

"Well, I've been round once before with big Roger, and he's hip. He lives with his mother; she'll be in bed by now. We can tell if his light is on. Otherwise, we'll have to retrack, but at least we can warm up by walking. I'm freezing".

"Worth a try. When were you there with the Eagle?"

So, yes, we could still walk and talk... the acid just wasn't that good. Over the clanking metal park gates and out into straight-world, giggling, and heading up the icy pavement of St Werburgh's road, we fantasised: "It was approximately 10.30 pm, December 1969, m'lud, when I observed the suspects trespassing in the afore-mentioned Chorlton Park. The gates are always locked at dusk. They were obviously high on drugs".

"Deserve the noose", chipped in Finbar, with an obsequious tone "... a trained copper can always spot 'em... talking to trees, staring wildly at the stars are two dead give-aways, your worship." He paused for a misty breath.

Not to mention the army greatcoats, long hair and purple haze."

"Purple haze?" "Exactly m'lud...all around his brain."

"I see, pray continue..."

"I recognised them as two Xav's sixth-form lads, Stephen Hopkins and Finbar Humphries. Catholic scum", I added, warming to the theme, although I was never as good at these imagining games as Finbar.

I played straight man to his comic genius. It was generally best to catch him on the way up in a drinking and smoking session, before he became totally incoherent, as was increasingly his pattern. Adopting a conspiratorial low whisper,

"Concealing myself behind a nearby, conveniently positioned rhododendron bush, I eavesdropped on their depraved conversation, in order to ascertain how dangerous they were, and uncover their game, m'lud".

"Indeed", I exclaimed pompously.

"And what indeed was the nature of their conversation?", I enquired with a salacious tone, and rolling Marty Feldman eyes "Was it indeed of a sexual nature? Sex games????"

Barry laughed. "Indeed, hard to tell, your honour", he whispered, "I now quote from my notebook." Pause for effect, and throat-clearing. "Hmm. Hmm. And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for. Don't ask me I don't give a damn. Next stop is..."

"Beg your pardon, officah?", I said, taking a deep drag on the dwindling joint and passing it to Barry, "nearly roach".

"What defendants said, m'lud. Verbatim.". Barry finished the joint, "Ugh, cardboard", and stubbed into the snow. He smoked normal fags, so could handle the last rites better than me.

"Pray continue, officah".

"...Next stop is Vietnam. And it's five, six, seven, open up those pearly gates. Ain't no reason to ask me why. Yippee, we're all gonna die. Hmmm. That's it, your 'onna."

It has started to snow - beautiful large flakes that swirled in large circles around the orange street lamps before alighting delicately on the road. By the time we had turned right at Wilbraham Rd, the road was thickly carpeted in white. As we headed east, I realised that I could not remember the number of the house. "Minor prob, Barry, seem to have temporarily forgotten which house".

"Bummer", shivered Barry in response.

"S'alright, I should recognise it when we see it", I said hesitantly. As we progressed on the right-hand pavement, the thickening snowstorm did not help, making all the gardens look the same Xmas card perfect but one semi-detached house on the left-hand side had a light on in the upstairs front bedroom. Possible. It seemed to beckon like the gingerbread house, and as we drew level with it, the falling snow started to gather itself into definite, curved lines spiralling gracefully out from the house, and seemed to embrace the back of my neck like oversized, animated pipe-cleaners, like the tentacles of a giant fairy-tale jelly fish, like fuzzy lines of magnetic force from a furry monopole, like delicate seaweed billowing in a shallow lagoon, like the world was filled with magic.

"Hey, that kif wasn't as weedy as I thought", I surmised.

"Are we any nearer this Jordan place, then?" enquired Barry, "I'm beginning to freeze up". He was showing slight unease about the notion of turning up at the house of a stranger.

"Not sure, could be that one, it's got a vibe, but let's check a little further first. Doesn't do to knock on the wrong door after eleven pm, wild-eyed and grinning. Could cause some old fart to have a heart attack. You know - Daily Mail - wild men from Borneo implicated in mystery fatality"

"Dunno, might be cool chicks having a party. Au pairs from Sweden".

Barry's ever-optimistic streak was one of his fine qualities, but I suspected he was merely disguising his growing concern. As we proceeded further, I felt the snow grow steadily colder, melting down the back of my greatcoat. I felt colder inside as well, as I realised that I might have dragged Barry on a wild goose chase. Daily Mail - drug addicts frozen bodies mystery midnight fatality, I thought but didn't say. I had thought Tim's place was nearer the traffic lights, but as we approached them, the bright green glowing happily through the mist, I knew we'd passed it.

"OK, let's go back on the other side". As I turned round, I saw clearly the great spiralling tendrils had become even more pronounced and were emanating from some mysterious centre within the house with the bedroom light.

"Can you see that", I asked Barry.

"Yeah, weird".

We were now being pulled by strange, delightful magnetism onwards towards the house. But it was our first time; magnetic vortex virgins we. An inner warmth, a peaceful happiness growing. As we drew nearer, the snow began to thin, but I could see and feel the delicate astral pipe-cleaners grow softer, warmer and delightfully furry. They were huge willowy mind waves, gently wafting in pastel fronds near the bottom of an unseen ocean of cosmic current.

"Far out". We went through the gate, all doubt about the right house having evaporated. We arrived, pressed the bell, slightly nervous, in case Tim's Irish mother opened the door. Tim appeared. A look of recognition crossed his face. "Hey, Steve?"

"Yeah, sorry, man, we're tripping, freezing, and we need to warm up", I blurted out, with a shiver, "we also thought you might be able to sell us enough dope for a joint". As it was 1969, I'd just used the acidhead equivalent of the Royal 'we' decree, the Star Wars 'voice': 'we're tripping'. *Translation*: 'we have deliberately rendered ourselves as capable as dealing with the practical exigencies of worldly life as three-year-old children, and if you yourself, as one who has been here yourself, do not take care of us immediately, we may well inadvertently cause our own demise in these arctic conditions, and you wouldn't want that on your conscience for the rest of your life, would you, my comrade and fellow pilgrim????' 'Furthermore, as we are your recognizably twinkle-eyed brothers, brethren of the cosmic pie-eyed clan, as signified by our long hair, pray do further the revolution and let us in'.

"Hi, yeah, I'm Barry, how do you do...we're kinda on the edge between the first and second bardo, right now... could do with a lift... you know..." *Translation*: 'Never met you before, you seem alright, so I'll second what Steve just said' - plus the subtextual challenge: 'Anyone who's anyone knows what a bardo is... right?'

"Oh right, you had better come up, then", raising his right eyebrow, "quiet on the way up, please. I'd better check that mother's on a different bardo."

We followed him up the wide, Edwardian stairs to the comfortable upstairs sitting room, as befitting the home of the professional class, and, dumping our heavy snow dusted coats, sat on velvet upholstery, welcome after the cold, wet grass of the park. We slowly absorbed sputtering warmth from the wall-mounted gas fire in its walnut cabinet as it struggled to heat the room. Tim's deceased father had been a general practitioner. Cups of reviving tea. A short conversation on the merits of various teabag brands; 'Indian Prince' a winner, only available in the South of England, packaged in blue and gold good vibes box. "It just so happens that I've got some pretty splendid sheerash², enough for a couple of spliffs. Here, do you want to roll up", offered Tim, "mother's gone to bed, so there's no problem". He had a pleasantly resonant baritone voice that always sounded like he was enjoying a secret, private joke.

Barry obliged, setting up the papers for one of his five-skin Stockport specialities, "the Hillgate Heavy", a distant cousin of the Camberwell Carrot.

Remembering the exact flow of an acid-influenced conversation is probably beyond the capabilities of even the most retentive memorious. Except of course for the CIA operatives who used to tape them as part of their studies of the potential of psychedelic drugs for spying, brainwashing, interrogation and remote viewing. I digress, however, and the following two elements will suffice to delineate our meeting. Earlier that day, I had been labouring over a handwritten letter in my small attic bedroom and for some bizarre reason I had been carrying it in my greatcoat pocket all night. On impulse, I showed it to Tim. Somehow, he had acquired a reputation as a man of unusual wisdom, a sort of a guru, in South Manchester's boho-hippy circle; I might get some brownie points.

This was a special letter, a feat of authentic magic, as I considered it: One wrote something uplifting and imbued with spiritual potency, and then posted it to some random person whose address was selected from the telephone directory. Just for fun, and the cost of a stamp. Some might nowadays refer to it as 'an intervention' or 'installation' or even a 'curated letter' and apply for Arts Council funding. I thought of it as a small event with potential life-changing consequences for someone, the proverbial butterfly's wings that flapping give rise to a storm. Maybe. But post thee not to Nutty, Fred, whose brave, uncensored entry in the Manchester telephone directory had resulted in his receiving a plethora of anonymous calls along the lines of "Hello, is that Nutty Fred?... Yeah, how are you mate?"

"Who is it?"

"Don't you recognise me? It's Barmy Bill!!!!" By way of explanation, we were not long since schoolboys.

I had recently been soaking up "A Treatise on Yoga" by the eminent scholar Mercia Eliade, at the time, and my letter was all-encompassing in its poetic ambition, along the

² you say sheerash, I say charas, you say hashish, I say shit, man err, let's call the whole thing off.

lines of 'Oh dear recipient, know this! Brahma Is All Being Is Vishnu Is All Love and All Joy Is Shiva Who Is Everlasting Peace' + another twenty-five lines of similar purple prose. I was quite proud of my little venture. I was also an arrogant eighteen-year-old snurd, who, as a side effect of coming top in class too many times, thought that I was so near to Enlightenment that a couple more tabs (of acid) and a couple of hours cross-legged under a sycamore tree in the park ought to sew up this whole Nirvana business, at which point I could start telling other people how to live their lives, just like my dad did.

Tim was kind, I discovered. "Wow, my mind would be blown if I received a letter like that". Correct response.

"Yeah, it's alright, that letter", chimed in Barry, passing round a giant spliff. Barry was also being kind; as he was the only person I knew who claimed to understand Bob Dylan's lyrics, I imagine he really thought my letter was a cocktail of sugary, old-school, second-rate, derivative shite. Tim was also knowledgeable, and also liked to play at wrangling. "But are you sure that it isn't Brahma who is All Love?" he said earnestly but perhaps teasingly, mocking the technicalities of the Hindu pantheocracy. I took him seriously. My ego was stung... I'd just read it in the authoritative Eliade, so that was that... I knew my stuff.

"Maybe", I replied defensively.

"I used to be into all the Hindu and especially Buddhist stuff too, but, I don't know... too many words, why not a God called Hotpoint, and another called Frigidaire? After all, isn't God in everything, including household appliances? Heh, heh. And then all Cold shalt be absorbeth by the Heated One, and vice versa? Being is beyond words."

He emphasized his point:

"Word concepts can never encompass the truth; it's a state of Mind and it's far too vast". After a giant toke³, Tim continued:

"These days I'm finding a new interest in Christianity... I mean, Christ was obviously 'there', man, and his central message is just Love..."

The conversation and dope circulated a while, and I began to feel high again.

"Hey, I've been reading some far-out poetry recently, let me read you some. It's by St John of the Cross", offered Tim. Barry and I were about to get our first proper RI⁴ lesson. He began to read.

*I entered into unknowing, yet when I saw myself there, without knowing where I was,
understood great things;
I will not say what I felt for I remained in unknowing, transcending all knowledge.*

³ Deep inhalation

⁴ RI = Religious Instruction in shorthand of Catholic School timetable

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As Tim read the mystic's verse, I felt a need to shut my eyes. A mysterious glow of a subtle yellow-white light of a blissful nature began to flood the interior of my body. Something more than weak acid and pot was at work...

*That perfect knowledge was of peace and holiness held at no remove in profound solitude;
it was something so secret that I was left stammering, transcending all knowledge.*

Huge thought pictures of an immanent, heavenly world flashed through my mind quicker than the speed of words. I saw clearly how words not only slowed down mental perception, but also limited it to clodlike predefined concepts. This was a new way to think, fluid, and free of words.

*I was so 'whelmed, so absorbed and withdrawn, that my senses were left deprived of all their
sensing,
and my spirit was given an understanding while not understanding, transcending all
knowledge.*

It seemed clear that Tim was emphasising the point he had made earlier by some sort of telepathic power. I guess that this was the moment when I began to develop a serious awe of him, but mentally I surrendered as he read the poem with a sudden surprising passion in his voice, as if he had connected with some divine power. As he read, the inner light grew brighter and stronger, and I felt it concentrate itself as a blinding flame at the centre of my forehead.

*He who truly arrives there cuts free from himself; all that he knew before now seems
worthless,
and his knowledge so soars that he is left in unknowing transcending all knowledge.*

The flame was diamond-like in its purity and it seized my being like a vice. I could sense that the same thing was happening to Barry. The light brought with it an overwhelming bliss. Right here in this very space occupied by body and mind, and rather perplexingly, previously entirely unnoticed by me, was a colossal vacuum brimful of profoundly satisfying self-luminous emptiness. The void.

*The higher he ascends the less he understands, because the cloud is dark which lit up the
night;*

whoever knows this remains always in unknowing transcending all knowledge.

*This knowledge in unknowing is so overwhelming that wise men disputing can never
overthrow it,*

*for their knowledge does not reach to the understanding of not
understanding, transcending all knowledge.*

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What does bliss mean? There was a feeling of physical pleasure, on this occasion simply a comfortable, familiar naturalness, as if I'd always known this third eye, but just temporarily misplaced it. That sounds anodyne but the revelation was actually very powerful. The bliss was at the mental and emotional level. One is suddenly aware that there ARE absolute certainties in life, and the ultimate certainty is that the Universe is good; despite all the apparent pain, the Universe will in the long term take care of you.

*And this supreme knowledge is so exalted that no power of man or learning can grasp it;
he who masters himself will, with knowledge in unknowing, always be transcending.*

Behind the separated egoic illusion of everyday life, all is One and that One is Love. I saw clearly in that room that somehow, Barry, Tim and I were nothing less than the same divine being, Love, masquerading as three different beings for our own entertainment.

Not the soppy, floppy, goody-goody popish Love so over-rated by those self-appointed purveyors of piety, the dull and dutiful patriarchal hierophants whose divine decree is to protect YOU from yourself. No, not those proponents of the antithesis of spirituality. Not even the rosy, posy cherubim and cheruba (sic) Love. But instead Las Vegas and Niagara Falls, inter-galactic, Lou Reed, mad, bad Bash Street Kids and Cleopatra fuck-me-now, die-for-me later, Patrick Moore plays xylophone, Sherlock Holmes says Aha!, the coloured girls go doo-doo-doo kinda Love. A trillion gaily clad human actors pass through the stage whilst a zillion trillion stars share a thrilling vast vision of eternity with beams of light between themselves. What a revelation! not an intellectual revelation, but I could see it, I could see you, I could see me. Ha Ha Ha, I wanted to laugh at the utter cosmic hilarious goodness of it all. What joy, Floy! what beauty! Put a gallon in her, Alan! And simultaneously with this powerful energising elation, I felt dissolved in a complete peace and the vast stillness that goes with the clear recognition that 'aah, one's soul is safe'... yes all you materialists and reductionists, your eternal souls, too, are safe, although not from each other, apparently. And what is this Love thing? A drop in the ocean. Here words must cease, save to say that, when we meet, as we eventually all must re-meet, it will be infinitely more blissful than anything you could ever imagine.

But we should keep trying to imagine, nevertheless.

Koan 1: Imagine a Happiness that is better than any Happiness you can ever imagine.....

*And if you should want to hear: this highest knowledge lies in the loftiest sense of the essence of God;
this is a work of his mercy, to leave one without understanding, transcending all knowledge.*

Tim reached the end of the poem. We opened our eyes, and he said

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"I'm tired now, and I need to crash".

Our audience was clearly over. I was now fully awe-stricken and felt majorly grateful for having had my eyes opened. All three of them! Before we knew it, we were on his porch saying

"Thanks, man" without being exactly sure what we were thanking him for.

We walked home in the snow, my third eye still glowing like a lantern, and with the inner eye I could see Barry's glowing too. Quite funny really, like two candlestick beings lifted from Walt Disney's Fantasia animation with Tchaikovsky's 'Everyone's a fruit and nut case, da-da-da-da-dah-dah-dah-daah-dee daah', swaying synchronously along the pavement, breath clouds sparkling, and not a single passing car to witness or disturb the deep silence behind our snow-crunching boots. I knew our lantern lights would fade...I certainly knew I lacked the spiritual wherewithal to sustain mine. By the time we reached 355 Wilbraham Rd, we were ready to sneak in and crash out ourselves, me in my bed, Barry on cushions on the floor. Soft, psychotropic meteorites glided past krypton-green, undiscovered planets under my eyelids, as the trip wore off, and as we creaked up on stairs to the loft. We passed through father's snores as they spread radially throughout the landing. In contrast Mother's silent presence was imbued throughout the fabric of the house and either consciously or subconsciously, part of her brain would have been registering the fact that 'Stephen's home late again', allowing her to drift off to proper sleep.

We hit the sack, a new profound question formed in my mind:

Who was this guy, Tim Jordan?

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Hello, a last word from Dr Hoppo:

Congratulations if you read this far! Here's a simple question for you.

Do you want to know what happened next?

If your answer is yes, please send an email to steve@drhoppo.co.uk with the subject 'Skiving Off'.

If I eventually get enough positive responses, I will press it up as a physical paperback, which will then go on sale at my shop, for under a tenner.

So far, I have drafted twenty chapters, which still need a spot of editing, but with a little encouragement from your good selves, I'll wrap it up pronto.

Best wishes,
Steve H

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