

Tripping Yarns

The Fabulous Journeys of Dr.
Robinson K And His Interesting
Artistic Equipment



Compiled by M Banker

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Part I

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Dedication

To my lost friend, whose devotion to the landscape and development of artistic equipment for its elucidation were quite interesting.

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Prologue

I admit to apprehension upon receiving the request to compile this slim volume on behalf of my lifelong friend Dr. Robinson Knick, or K as he preferred to be known, so soon after the events that led to his disappearance. The scraps of text and film and that accompanied this anonymous invitation confirmed my unease that something terrible had indeed happened to my friend, and that if only I had recognised the signs and acted earlier I might have been able to prevent this unknown disaster. Perhaps it is a feeling of guilt that led me to agree to this anonymous request. Perhaps my efforts may yet initiate unforeseen events leading to some elucidation of his fate.

K and I grew up and went to school together on the South Coast of England, where I remember trouble free summers swimming, building rafts and cycling around the Downs. Even then he had an interest in the distant past and together we would spend long summer days trying to find and decipher seemingly meaningless bumps and hollows in the grass. Later, when it was finally time to contribute to the society that has so far sustained us, our paths parted. I turned to financial matters and later to Insurance, although he insisted on laughingly referring to me as the “Merchant Banker” for reasons that I could never divine. He on the other hand, being of a more scientific disposition at that time, left the South to study Medicine and later to pursue a reasonably satisfactory career in Mental Health and Management. I was dismayed that he had sacrificed a successful scientific career to pursue such arcane matters, but when we met in that special accommodation overlooking the seaside town of our origin, which he called “The Tower”, made necessary by my illness, I did not detect any change in his disposition.

I was surprised to learn that he had decided to retire from his moderately successful career in order, as he put it, to “Grow the other side of my brain”, but at least this meant that his visits became more frequent. I chided him for deserting his chosen career so early and hinted that he was squandering an expensive education. He responded with what I can only call irritated good humour, but looking back this may have been the reason that he began to confide in me his plans to seek an alternative in retirement to “Sitting in the garden waiting for death”.

My friend began to speak of his love of certain significant places, the sense of “Genius Loci” which he ascribed to the works of the painter

Paul Nash whose works we both loved, and how a better intuitive understanding of this might unlock the secrets of his own being. He began to “Sketch in the landscape with stone”, a ludicrous concept I suggest, learned to weave with willow, threw basketry spheres into streams and crawled into small woven observatories that he carried into the countryside for the apparent purpose of staring at the sky. I’m not sure that his accounts of this behavior reassured me but it seemed to keep him occupied, and I have to admit that sufficient of our fellow souls condone such matters to suggest that he was not yet sinking into the type of mental deterioration that he had devoted his career to attempting to combat. Indeed his intellect seemed unimpaired and he gave expression to passably respectable notions such as the “Aesthetic relations between the artist, sculptural object and landscape”, the ways in which we might learn from the spatial engagement of the Neolithic peoples with the landscape, and the mechanisms by which we project aspects of our own consciousness onto the landscape and vice versa. I was a little concerned by the incomprehension and frustration he experienced when trying to grapple with the French philosophers, and wondered whether this might herald a deterioration in his faculties, but have since learned that this reaction is to be expected from one with a rational intellect.

I cannot precisely determine the time or event when all this began to change. Perhaps it was when the elders suggested that he seek man made materials for the fabrication of his strange structures, to which he now referred as his “Artistic Equipment”, or when he began to seek a “Narrative Form” for reporting on his activities. He adopted the name “Robinson” and re-invented himself as a “Psychogeographer”, although “Psychomythologist” might have been a more accurate term. I was pleased to observe that he rejected the more self-obsessed, pseudo-philosophical and pseudo-magical preoccupations of that group, preferring to cling to his interest in past civilisations and cultures.

His first expedition, to the Source of the River Usk, was relatively uneventful and the recordings that I have inherited are straightforward, un-worrying and, frankly, boring. In these one can detect his love for the landscape, his attempts to explore it with his “Artistic Equipment” and the beauty of the Carmarthen Fan which was understandably one of the places he found “Significant”.

The events on Burnmoor were profoundly troubling for him. He was deeply concerned by his incomprehension of what had befallen the party and its possible deleterious effect upon his companions. That he

had survived this nightmare is indeed miraculous, and when with wild eyes he described the ordeal shortly after his return I initially thought that he was lost. As time went by he seemed to recover, although I could see the self-doubt in his eyes as he described the affair despite his usual pains to conceal this from me. Unwise though he may have been he was not lacking in pluck and determination, so it was inevitable that he would make another foray, but this time he chose to go alone.

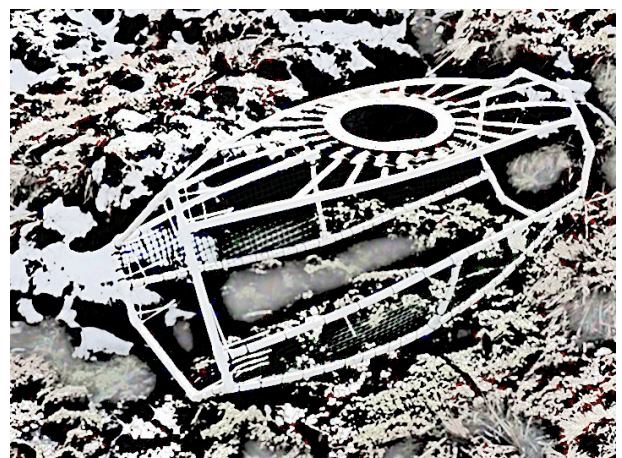
The final expedition, to follow the course of the alignment from Nant Tawr to Pen Y Fan Fawr, seemed to present no undue threat when Robinson outlined it to me. Now I am tormented with regret that I did not attempt to deter him or at least insist that he seek companions of greater mettle. I did not see him again and all my attempts to make contact were in vain. It was as if he had disappeared from the face of the earth. Now I cannot help but dare to hope that he still lives and that this anonymous request has come from him. But first let me recount what I know of his three fabulous journeys.



This is the upper valley of the river Usk where it issues from its mountain gorge onto the flat plains at the base of the Carmarthen Fan. This is one of the favourite haunts of Dr Robinson Knick, or “K” as he prefers to be known.



K is fording the River Usk where there is unplanned ice and snow. The contraption on his back is a piece of what he calls his artistic equipment. Since his retirement from a normal career K is exploring what he calls the Genius Loci, or what makes a place significant for him.



He seems to believe that this might in some way unlock the secrets of his own being. He talks about aesthetic relationships between the landscape, sculptural objects, and himself as an artist.

K now calls himself a “Psychogeographer”, which means that he has to have somewhere to go. Today he is bound for the source of the River Usk.



K doesn't want to sit in the snow so he places the observatory over the stream and takes photographs of them together.



K can also use the roof aperture of his little observatory to frame views of the surrounding landscape.



K finds a sheltered spot where he can use his artistic equipment as an observatory.



This is the purpose for which the roof aperture was intended.



He seems to think that if he puts the observatory in the landscape, then crawls into it, they all become as one.



On the return journey K visits the sacred site of Nat Tarw, the location of an ancient stone circle and fallen monolith.



Fan Foel, part of the Carmarthen Fan Scarp, overlooks the Nant Tarw Ritual Complex.



During the last three years K has learned to weave with willow, and has taken to throwing basket like spheres into streams and crawling into small woven observatories that he has carried into the countryside for the apparent purpose of staring at the sky



Recently the elders have suggested that he make these objects out of man made materials, perhaps in an attempt to wean him off these habits, but this is the result.



Suddenly K notices that a notch between two hills on the horizon frames a white mountain, Pen Y Fan Fawr, the highest peak in South Wales. He realises that the Stone Circle and Standing Stone have been placed upon a mystical alignment, and immediately decides that one day he must walk along this hallowed route to the White Mountain. He cannot know the terrible consequences of this decision.