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## **CYCLE OF PROFESSOR CHALLENGERS: GENIUS AND HUMANITY.**

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**Abstract:** In the plot of this work, A. Conan Doyle applies the theory of poisoned air which fills the cosmic space. According to the theory, there are regions in the universe that are dangerous to humanity. The land may be located in one of these areas. In describing this hypothesis, A. Conan Doyle predicts the catastrophe and emphasizes that preparing for it is a pressing issue facing humanity.

**Keywords:** science-fiction, space, the disaster, poison, landscape, scientific discovery, the fate of humanity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main achievements of Arthur Conan Doyle as a science fiction writer are associated with a series of works about Professor Challenger. Together with detective stories about Sherlock Holmes, these works brought him well-deserved fame. The cycle includes two stories (or short novels) "The Lost World" (The Lost World, 1912) and "The Poison Belt" (The Poison Belt, 1913), stories "The Disintegration Machine" (The Disintegration Machine, 1927) and "When the earth screamed" (When the World Screamed, 1928). The story "In the Land of Mists" (The Land of Mists, 1926), whose main character is also Professor Challenger, stands apart.

The author of the afterword to the 8th volume of the collected works of A. Conan Doyle in Russian A. Abramov believes that the writer "was never interested in either the implementation of the inventions and discoveries described by him, or the fundamental validity of his fantastic hypotheses." The critic sees the goal of Conan Doyle's sci-fi creativity in the following: "he did not pose any big social or

philosophical problems for himself. He was even less attracted by his popularizing tasks. The writer was attracted by the romance of the genre itself, the sharpness of plot conflicts, the creation of typical characters in exceptional circumstances, which were revealed to him in the development of his bold fantastic assumptions ”. [1, art, 479]. We can agree with the last part of this statement. But, first of all, why then call Conan Doyle's fiction "scientific" (this concept is omitted in the title of the article, but is used in its text)? And, secondly, in the future we will try to prove that in his best science fiction works, Conan Doyle seeks to address serious social, moral and philosophical problems.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The Lost World is Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous science fiction novel. It is known that the writer conceived this work after a conversation with the traveler and scientist Fawcett. The French zoologist, Professor Bernard Eyvelmans, in his book "In the footsteps of unknown animals", expresses the belief that nature in the "Lost World" was copied from the mountains of Riccardo Franco-Blas on the border between Brazil and Bolivia, where Fawcett actually visited. B. Eivelmans reports that Conan Doyle met with Fawcett in London and saw photographs taken by the traveler. In Evelmans' book, an excerpt from Fawcett's letter is quoted: "He dreamed of writing a novel with a setting in South America and asked me about many things. The result was his "The Lost World", which deserved such a resounding success. " [2, Art, 431].

The Lost World depicts a volcanic plateau in the wilds of South American forests, cut off from the world and completely unexplored. Such a plateau does exist. In the early 30s, an expedition went to him, which could not climb it. After that it was examined from the air, but nothing that was described in the book by Conan Doyle was found.

The Lost World belongs to the so-called biological (or zoological fiction). The author's scientific hypothesis boils down to the following: in some remote regions of the Earth that have not yet been mastered by people, forms of ancient

fauna, in particular, ancient lizards (dinosaurs, pterodactyls, etc.), could have survived. Arthur Conan Doyle was not the first to make this assumption, and far from the last. Many works of fiction, as well as scientific and popular science publications are devoted to this topic.

The novel *The Poisoned Belt* became a kind of continuation of *The Lost World* (albeit a completely independent work).

A. Abramov believes that this story is "much less successful in the scientific sense" [3, art, 481]. The fact is that A. Conan Doyle uses in the plot of the work the theory, popular at that time, about the ether filling outer space. In space, according to this theory, there are areas that are dangerous to humanity if the Earth is in one of them. Conan Doyle, of course, puts the formulation of this hypothesis into the mouth of Challenger, who was the only one who foresaw the disaster and was able to prepare for it. The scientist explains to his friends:

"We are all poisoned. Our planet has fallen into a poisonous etheric zone and is sinking deeper into it at a speed of many millions of miles per minute "[4, [www.lib.ru/INPROZ/./AKONANDOJL](http://www.lib.ru/INPROZ/./AKONANDOJL)].

This hypothesis has long been rejected by science, but Conan Doyle, who lived and wrote long before space exploration, cannot be blamed for his fascination with this theory. Moreover, in this work the hypothesis itself fades into the background, and philosophical arguments about humanity, the meaning of its existence, are put forward to the fore.

Conan Doyle paints an impressive picture of a lifeless planet:

"Not a single bird soared under the blue sky; neither people nor animals animated the distant landscape in front of us. The sun, leaning towards sunset, continued to illuminate the country with a peaceful splendor, but a deep silence of universal destruction reigned over everything, the victims of which were soon to fall for us. "

The heroes of the story see the lifeless bodies of their contemporaries, lying where the catastrophe found them: men and women, old people and children, in

cars and on the grass, lying and sitting. The apocalyptic picture is crowned with an eerie silence, which in Conan Doyle symbolizes the possible end of human existence:

“The dead silence caused an eerie feeling. She was so solemn, so tragic that the panting and hum of our car seemed to us an obscene violation of it, a profanation of this stately peace, spreading like a huge shroud over the ruins of humanity. This numb, cemetery silence, combined with clouds of smoke, here and there rising to the sky above the ashes, tempered, like an icy breath, our warm admiration for the beauty of nature. ”

It is interesting that the writer explains many social conflicts by the action of the poison (ether). It is the poisoned air that causes street riots, uprisings and pogroms, and, as the story says, this happens differently for each nation.

In the description of the catastrophe there is some illogicality and even a certain naivety. People who have returned to life do not really remember anything. "Minute dizziness" is the only thing they remember, as if there were no attacks of suffocation. Everyone just woke up, got up and went back to business. The “salvation” of an old woman who breathed oxygen from a cylinder, which she used because of her illness, seems unconvincing. How did she last for the whole night, if the main characters used several cylinders during this time? It seems that here we again meet with artistic convention. For the sake of narrative dynamics, the author doesn't really care about the logic of the facts being presented.

The Poison Belt is not so much about a possible scientific discovery, the prediction of a catastrophe, but about the fate of mankind as a whole. Compared to *The Lost World*, this work has a clearly expressed philosophical character.

The action in the story "The Poisoned Belt" develops in four stages:

1. Events before the disaster, preparation of heroes for it.
2. Description of the coming cataclysm, impressions of the heroes of the story, its witnesses.

3. Awakening of humanity, which did not die, but only fell asleep and returns to its former life.

4. Conclusions that the heroes draw from the events that have taken place.

This plot scheme also determines the characteristics of the characters. All the heroes of the work, along with the rest of humanity, are involved in unusual circumstances. But, in contrast to *The Lost World*, here it is not so much adventures that are important as the reasoning of the characters about the meaning of life. All the heroes of the "Poisoned Belt" in the face of a universal cataclysm talk about the essence of man, the meaning of civilization. These reflections show the heroes from a new angle. Images are evolving. The author adds new details to their characterization.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

First of all, this concerns Professor Challenger.

"In the poisoned belt" the reader appears in many ways the same Challenger as in "The Lost World". Many of his features are already known from the first work. His harshness and rudeness in this story are even more pronounced. One of the characters describes him as follows:

“- Impossible person! exclaimed McArdle. "A newborn pigeon would seem to have cackled at its rudeness, and the most peaceful assembly of Quakers might rebel against it."

One of the main features of Challenger develops in the work - hatred of journalists. The narrator Malone, who has already become close to the professor during his trip to the dinosaurs, hears about the professor the opinion of his fellow in the craft and a compliment addressed to him:

“Last week, he grabbed the collar and braces of young Alec Snmpson from Courier and dragged him a mile along the highway. You must have read about this in the police chronicle, right? Our young employees would, perhaps, prefer to interview an alligator who escaped from the menagerie. You are the only person capable of this; you are a longtime friend of this crocodile. "

Challenger reinforces his hatred of journalists, who, in his opinion, represent the worst part of human society:

“Poisonous brat! Isn't it, Malone? The worst parasites of modern civilization, a voluntary tool in the hands of charlatans and a hindrance for anyone who respects himself. ”

And this story emphasizes his mental abilities, which are recognized even by his sworn enemies. One of them says:

“Just look at the size of his hat! That hat covers a sixty-ounce brain — a powerful machine, I swear to God, that works without a hitch and produces a great product. Show me the machine building, and I will determine the dimensions of the machine. ”

In *The Poison Belt*, Challenger appears all the same narcissistic personality. The reader will immediately recognize his appearance, to the description of which the author adds new details. The comparisons and epithets that Conan Doyle uses are short and vivid:

“He made a positively grand impression. All the turkeys of the universe could not have walked with a more proud gait than he, when he walked towards us along the platform, and the benevolent, condescending smile with which he looked at everyone who passed him was divine. If he had changed in any way since our last meeting, the change was mainly in the fact that his distinguishing features were now more pronounced than they once were. The powerful head with a bulging forehead and a strand of hair falling over the eyes seemed to have increased even more. A black beard fell majestically on his chest, and the expression of light gray eyes, in which a daring sardonic smile flashed, became even more imperious.

We see this translation as generally successful, but since the figurative language of Conan Doyle inevitably loses its brightness during translation, we cite the same fragment in the original language, in which such features of the writer's

artistic technique as the semantic richness of the phrase, the hyperbolicity of images and the subtlety of irony are obvious:

“Not all the turkey-cocks in creation could match the slow, high-stepping dignity with which he paraded his own railway station and the benignant smile of condescending encouragement with which he regarded everybody around him. If he had changed in anything since the days of old, it was that his points had become accentuated. The huge head and broad sweep of forehead, with its plastered lock of black hair, seemed even greater than before. His black beard poured forward in a more impressive cascade, and his clear gray eyes, with their insolent and sardonic eyelids, were even more masterful than of yore ”[5, [www.blackmask.com](http://www.blackmask.com)].

Challenger does not initially suggest that someone may have developed logical abilities, like himself, and condescendingly admits, despite the "difference in talents", the ability to think in Malone, whom he calls "a young friend."

Even the laws of nature give way to Challenger's conceit. When Summerlee reflects sadly that death is inevitable even for Challenger, the scientist protests:

"No, Summerlee, I don't want to know anything about your laws, because at least I seem to myself to be too powerful a phenomenon to be threatened by purely physical disintegration into a handful of salts and three buckets of water."

Without any hesitation, Challenger announces to his comrades about his plans to write an exceptionally brilliant book:

“My mental capital, everything that I have read so far, my experiments and observations, my truly exceptional talent - all this should have been concentrated in this book. She would undoubtedly usher in a new era in science. "

One of the features of Challenger, already known to the reader from *The Lost World*, is his respect for friendship. It is in the ability to be friends that the narrator Malone sees justification for all the negative qualities of the professor when he recalls their joint adventures. At any rate, Challenger is honest and straightforward.



“..He was a true friend of all of us. Whatever his shortcomings, he is a frank, straightforward person and would never say anything bad about his companions behind their backs. ”

As in *The Lost World*, Challenger appears in *The Poisoned Belt* as a true man of science, an adherent of its principles. The professor perceives the catastrophe that has happened only as an opportunity for a unique scientific experiment and when asked to commit suicide in a hopeless situation, he indignantly objects that he does not want to shorten "such an amazing experience" even for a minute. Glorifying science, Challenger defines the type of real researcher, to which he naturally refers:

“A truly scientific mind,” I say in the third person, so as not to seem boastful, “an ideal scientific mind should be able to invent a new abstract scientific theory even in that period of time that is needed for its carrier to fall from a balloon to the earth. Men of such a strong temper are needed to conquer nature and become pioneers of truth. ”

Thus, the features of Challenger, outlined in *The Lost World*, develop in the novel *The Poisoned Belt*, receive a new light. At the same time, Conan Doyle introduces completely new details to characterize his character. For example, the attitude of the hero to food. In this respect, Challenger looks like a clear follower of the humanists of the Renaissance, who glorified the material side of human existence. In the face of a terrible catastrophe, the professor does not lose his appetite, does not forget about the culinary abilities of his cook. Challenger worries that after the general death a rare wine will remain undrunked, and he hurries to invite his friends to the table: "It would be a regrettable waste to let this noble drink perish."

But the main difference between Challenger in "Poison Belt" is that he is no longer a lone hermit. He is married, and the circumstances of his married life illuminate this person from the other side, complement his portrait. Being capable of self-irony, the professor wittily defines the contrast between himself and his

wife, strikingly complementing each other: "If you imagine a gorilla next to a gazelle, then you can form an idea of this couple."

Malone is amazed at their relationship. A fragile woman and a rude Challenger sincerely love each other, they cannot exist without each other. Before their inevitable death, their feelings are shown in front of their friends. The startled Malone states:

"Here, overshadowed by death, was revealed that Challenger who was hiding in the deepest depths of this personality, the man who managed to win and keep the love of his wife."

Saying goodbye to death, each of the spouses comically defines the purpose and meaning of their lived life:

"- I thank heaven for the fact that I still have my home and my husband. My purpose in life is the same," Mrs. Challenger said.

"Me too," Challenger remarked. "There is as much scientific work as you want, and the catastrophe itself will put us to solve many extremely interesting problems."

As the action progresses, Challenger becomes more and more philosophical. He is concerned not only with scientific discoveries, but with the entire experience of human development, the meaning of its existence. At the same time, the scientist acts as a humanist who highly values a person as such. When Summerlee expresses doubt that human existence is the highest goal of the development of nature, the scientist sharply objects: "Of course, sir, for what other purpose?"

True, Challenger admits that the person may be "just a by-product, accidentally arising in this process." The professor is referring to the claim of man to call himself the highest creation of nature. Challenger views man as a part of the universe, closely related to all of its elements. Human ambition often leads to stupidity and violence. The professor urges you to really perceive your place in the world, to drop excessive claims:

"The situation is exactly the same as if the foam on the surface of the ocean imagined that the ocean should only serve its creation and preservation, or if the mouse in the cathedral believed that the building was erected only for its habitation."

Humanity must learn a lesson, realize its dependence on the forces of nature. From this point of view, a catastrophe, according to the scientist, is a kind of retribution to humanity for excessive self-conceit. Through the lips of Challenger, Conan Doyle sarcastically compares people to bacilli, and God to a gardener who protects the world he created from them.

"Maybe he needs room for a new, less harmful bacillus. Be that as it may, he plunges it into poison - and the bacilli disappear. Fate does the same with the solar system, and soon the human bacillus, a small mortal insect that wriggled and writhed on the surface of the earth's crust, will be removed from existence through sterilization. "

This is what Challenger sees as the meaning of the ongoing catastrophe. When it turns out that people did not die, but only fell asleep, Challenger believes that this is the very lesson that human society should take into account in its future existence.

The rest of the characters in the novel come to similar conclusions. The narrator Malone undergoes a kind of spiritual evolution. The adventurer, the adventurer, is reborn, not without the influence of Challenger, into a philosopher and thinker, in whose words the author argues.

Malone first thinks about the end of the world approaching. Previously, these were empty words, but now, when the globe has fallen into a strip of poisonous ether, not yet knowing how everything will end, Malone sadly reflects: "End of the world! How often have we heard this word! That it can be transformed into reality, that it means not only a moment completely indefinite in time, but on the contrary - this time, our "today" - it was a destructive, desperate thought. " Seeing immobilized people, the narrator, in his youth, thinks only of death:

“This phenomenon was universal and was outside the limits of human science and power. It was death - painless, but inevitable, for the old and young, for the sick and healthy, for the poor and the rich, and there was no escape from it. ”

Malone is shocked by the disaster. Like Challenger, Malone begins to express skeptical thoughts about the nature of man, his ambitions. The narrator states bitterly:

"The human race disappeared, died out in one day, but the planets continue to spin, the winds whisper, and nature lives its own life up to the amoeba, and soon there will be no traces of the stay on earth of those creatures who considered themselves the crown of creation."

Malone admits that even his excellent health and energetic nature could not keep him from depression. "True Irishman", an optimist who finds "glimpses of hope" even in the darkest of situations.

All the heroes of the story, "the rearguard of mankind on the way into the unknown," are united by this concept. Summerlee and Rexton are not so vividly depicted in this work. The author notes changes in their appearance. For example, Rexton, still wearing a hunting suit, turned gray, the wrinkles on his face became deeper. But this is the same noble gentleman traveler, adventurer.

Rexton and Summerlee are completely subordinate to Challenger and only occasionally insert witty lines. So Summerlee, an active man, cannot passively wait for impending death. Here he is very similar to Challenger. Virtually nothing remained of their disagreements. Summerlee states:

“I could not say that I am afraid of death more than you all, because in any case, I have not long to live. But I am not able to sit quietly and wait for her without trying to resist, like a ram waiting for a butcher. ”

In another case, analyzing the situation and assuming the possibility of saving other people, Summerlee uses Challenger's comparisons: "So, can't it be

assumed that the disinfection was incomplete and that, like us, other people survived?"

Humor and witticisms, despite the seriousness of the problems posed in the story, are found in its text quite often. Rexton's remark about Malone's message that he wrote notes about the catastrophe looks witty. Still not knowing that humanity was saved, Rexton mocks the journalist, hinting at a new round in the evolution of nature:

"I'm only afraid you won't wait for your readers until your little sister Amoeba grows up, who, for the time being, seems to be not sufficiently interested in what is happening."

The parody dialogue between Challenger and his servant Austin looks funny. The traditional English devotion of the laconic servant to his master, which is not even affected by the universal cataclysm, colors the scene of the heroes' farewell to life in humorous tones:

"Austin! the professor called out to him.

- What will you order, sir?

- I thank you for your faithful service.

A smile flickered over the chapped servant's face.

"I was only doing my duty," he said.

"The world will die today, Austin.

- Yes, sir. What time is it, sir?

"I can't tell you exactly, Austin. Even before the evening.

- Very good".

## **CONCLUSION**

The question of an old woman who survived the cataclysm looks amusing: will these events affect the actions of the North-Western Railway?

The humorous element complements the basic sci-fi and philosophical content of *The Poisoned Belt*. It can be argued that in this work Arthur Conan Doyle managed to rise to a new ideological and artistic level.

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