The Lost City of Z Study Guide

The Lost City of Z by David Grann

Contents

Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Grann, David. The Lost City of Z. Vintage Departures. First Edition.

The book opens with a prologue about the author's journey into the Amazon. His mission is to find out the truth about what happened to Colonel Percy Fawcett, a 1920s British explorer who vanished with his son, Jack, during an expedition into the jungle to find a fabled lost city called “Z.” The narrative shifts to a chapter describing Fawcett's last days in American society, where Fawcett and Jack left New Jersey to great fanfare. The story is then told from the beginning of Percy Fawcett's life and the author's personal quest to solve Fawcett's mystery.

Fawcett was born in Victorian England. He had a need for physical adventure that was stifled by his cold parents and his repressive era. Fawcett later joined the military and was stationed in Ceylon (formerly Sri Lanka), where he met his future wife, Nina, and discovered his love for exploration. He joined the Royal Geographical Society and trained to be a formal explorer. During these chapters, the author describes his growing obsession with Fawcett and how many Fawcett seekers met their doom trying to find out the truth about him. He tells the story of James Lynch, a Brazilian banker who was kidnapped by native tribes with his son during one such Fawcett search. The author admits he has never even gone camping but he will go to the Amazon to research Fawcett and The Lost City of Z.

In 1905, Fawcett was commissioned to map the Peru-Bolivian border in the Amazon. His first expedition in the jungle was beset by disaster, with tribes and environments that strived to kill him and his party. Fawcett succeeded at his quest a year ahead of time. Fawcett returned to the Amazon to locate the source of the Rio Verde, but the mission was more disastrous than his first. Many died along the way. Over the next several years, Fawcett constantly journeyed into the jungle for months and years a time. The missions were always perilous; Fawcett and arctic explorer James Murray fought during an entire trip. There was a major financial and emotional strain on his family, especially for Nina. She wanted to join her husband on his journeys but she was barred because of society's sexism. She put her hopes and dreams in her son Jack. During these chapters, the author prepares for his trip and researches Fawcett's final letters. He learns about Fawcett's real route to Z on his last quest.

Based on Fawcett's various artifact discoveries, he developed a theory that an ancient sophisticated society once existed in the Amazon. He called it “Z” and made it his life's goal to discover the ruins, which he believed would immortalize him. Fawcett's chief rival in this quest was an affluent explorer named Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice. Rice's funding allowed him to cover wide areas of the Amazon and Fawcett feared Rice would find Z before he could.

Fawcett fought in World War One, where he saw European atrocities that made the Amazon's savagery pale in comparison. It challenged everything he believed about the white man's superiority.

Over the next few years, Fawcett intensified his search for Z to his family's cost. They were soon bankrupt and he had still not found the city. Although he could not get funding because no one in Britain believed in Z, Fawcett was finally able to secure funding from America for his last attempt. Jack and his best friend Raleigh Rimell accompanied Fawcett into the jungle, the infamous final expedition where the party vanished. Witnesses and last letters of correspondence revealed how their party was marked by naivety and disillusion. Raleigh broke down early on and wanted to go home. They were last seen venturing into hostile native territory.

The author travels to Brazil and secures a guide. His first foray into the jungle teaches him how faraway rock formations can be mistaken for ancient ruins, leading him to believe Fawcett was mistaken about Z. The author is introduced to the chief of a Xingu River tribe who agrees to share what he knows about Fawcett in exchange for a reward. They travel to a Xingu village where natives live according to their ancient customs. The chief confesses that his tribe once lied about discovering Fawcett's remains for a reward. The author makes the acquaintance of an anthropologist named Michael Heckenberger in the Xingu village; Heckenberger shows the author the remnants of an ancient civilization that once flourished in the jungle, its traces now practically invisible. The author is floored by the discovery, which challenges long-held notions of Amazonian civilizations, like Fawcett strove to do.

Part One (Chapters 1-5)

Summary

Colonel Fawcett's story is told in past tense. Colonel Fawcett was a world-renowned Amazon explorer, and one of the last great Victorian geographers who explored uncharted lands in South America. In 1925, Fawcett embarked on his most dangerous and secretive quest: a mission to find The Lost City of Z, a mythical Eldorado-like city of gold. Although Fawcett had many detractors who did not believe in Z's existence, the eyes of the world were upon him. Fawcett believed a sophisticated city existed based on his old forays into the Amazon, information he guarded jealously. For his quest, Fawcett brought along his son Jack and Jack's best friend Raleigh Rimell. Fawcett believed they were both hardy young men who would stay loyal to him in the jungle. Jack grew up idealizing his father and had been preparing for such a journey all his life. Raleigh was inseparable from Jack, though he lived a less austere life than his best friend. In Hoboken, New Jersey, Fawcett and the boys were sent off with great fanfare as they begun the next leg of their journey. They promised to bring back proof of Z to reporters and well-wishers.

The author says the Amazon can “easily deceive” (19). This deception extends even to its river, the mightiest in the world, whose origins lie in a modest rocky trickle in the Andes. The author then shifts into the story of James Lynch in 1996, a Brazilian banker who ventured into the Amazon with a search party including his son. They were attempting to uncover the mystery of Colonel Fawcett, who had disappeared during his quest to find Z in the 1920s, a mystery that had plagued the exploration world for years. They retraced Colonel Fawcett's last steps with the latest modern technology. One evening while traveling down the Xingu river, a native tribe known as the Kuikoros ambushed them. They were taken hostage and their fate was an open question. James Lynch's story was not uncommon; since the 1920s, an estimated 100 explorers have died trying to find evidence of Fawcett's last mission.

The author then launches into Fawcett's past before setting off for Z. Fawcett grew up in a neglectful environment with an alcoholic father and an unhappy mother. At odds with Victorian propriety around, Fawcett always pined for the outdoors and physical exercise. The author writes Fawcett viewed life as, “a never-ending war against the physical forces surrounding him” (40). His love for exploration developed when he was stationed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as a young man. His superior officer gave him a local map to a legendary treasure, which Fawcett tried to unearth with a team of men. Although he found nothing, it gave him a thirst for adventure. Fawcett then met Nina, an ambassador's daughter who would be his future wife, at a military gathering. Fawcett also had a close relationship with this brother Edward; both of them shunned English society by converting to Eastern religions. Edward also wrote adventure stories and Fawcett was fascinated by them.

Throughout the first five chapters, the story shifts to the author's personal story in 2007 as he ventured into the Amazon to retrace Colonel Fawcett's last steps too. The author describes his obsession when researching subjects for stories, often forgetting to shower or pay bills. The author discovers that environmentalists have historically believed no sophisticated city like Z could have endured in the hostile, nutrient-leeched Amazon. But he also learns many revisionist archaeologists and anthropologists have, “increasingly begun to challenge these long-standing views, believing that a civilization could have in fact emerged in the Amazon” (34). Believing Fawcett's conception of Z possible, the author tells his wife he is leaving on a trip for the Amazon. She is supportive but not thrilled. He admits he lives a cushy life, takes the elevator, and has never even gone camping before.

The author journeys to the Royal Geographic Society in London, a famous society founded during the Industrial Revolution that counted Fawcett and many famous figures among its members. It was created to chart the last corners of the world and dispel foreign myths yet it still perpetuated ignorant myths of its own. With the society's permission, the author is given a rare glimpse of Fawcett's last missives sent to the organization before his disappearance. The author learns Fawcett went to school to become an explorer.

Analysis

Destiny is major theme of the book, from Colonel Fawcett himself to the very land. The author states, “society is a captive of geography” (4). Many archaeologists dismiss the notion that a once-great city could have been created in the Amazon due to the nutrient deprived conditions, hostile environment, and disease-ridden air. Fawcett, like the jungle, resisted this easy belief and fights against the seemingly impossible to prove something to the world. Fawcett tethered his own self-worth to the belief of a great Amazonian society until the two become one and the same. Fawcett often called his quest, “my destiny” (53). He literally believed it was his fate to find a great city. In proving the existence of Z, Fawcett fought to no longer become a captive of his own personal geography, which was repressive Victorian England. The theme of destiny returns throughout the book in different forms, as will be seen in later chapters.

Another theme in the first five chapters is Fawcett's desire to make fantasy the reality. It is revealed that Edward had written adventure novels that Fawcett loved. He was a very physical young boy who felt constrained by the stuffy conventions imposed upon him and yearned for the outdoors. The author states, “Such fervor contributed to Fawcett's view of life as a never-ending war against the physical forces surrounding him” (40). Constantly brought up to believe his natural wanderlust was wrong, he was in a constant struggle with his environment. It was a struggle he carried with him to the Amazon where his struggle against the elements was at its most intense. A picture emerges of Fawcett as someone who was at odds with his contemporary society. His quest to find a society in the wilderness is a beautiful reflection of his own desire to find a proper home, and his own peace. It is ironic when the author quotes a Royal Geographical Society member who once noted, “explorers are not, perhaps, the most

promising people with whom to build a society. Indeed, some might say that explorers become explorers precisely because they have a streak of unsociability and a need to remove themselves at regular intervals as far as possible from their fellow men" (60). Nothing could be truer for Fawcett.

As a young boy, Fawcett craved adventure and wanted to become one of the characters he read about in adventure novels. He was naturally attracted to the sections of the world map blackened out by the title "unexplored." The amazon was thus a perfect place for him. The author writes, "Fawcett was setting out into the Amazon, a wilderness nearly the size of the continental United States, to make what he called "the great discovery of the century"-- a lost civilization" (10). The intermingling of fantasy and reality informed his entire life. He sought glory until it consumed him, but the thrill of the adventure was his true passion.

Obsession is another major theme of the work, and it is a through-line connecting all the chapters in some form or another. Fawcett's obsession is the most obvious case, which defines his life in later chapters. But every explorer who set off to find Fawcett, the author included, was touched in some way by obsession. Lynch, like Fawcett, was an incorrigible explorer lured by the call of the wild. He also brought his son along for the trip, just like Fawcett once did. This parallel is not only superficial; it suggests there is a hereditary nature to obsession and exploration. Unfortunately, the fate of these explorers is often also the same. Lynch's story with his son offers a cautionary tale. It also suggests a possible ending to Colonel Fawcett's mysterious disappearance, which no one has ever been able to solve.

The author's obsession mirrors this as well. When the author works on stories he can, "tend to lose sight of everything else. I forget to pay bills or to shave" (32). Passion and obsession are double-edged swords. In the first five chapters, the author slowly becomes consumed by the Fawcett and his quest for Z, much the same way Fawcett once was. The book implies this obsession is contagious, but more likely found in the blood. Some are simply obsessive and driven by glory.

Vocabulary

repository, eclipsed, nourishment, bedraggled, billowing, gabardine, chronometer, crackpot, industrialization, petroglyphs, degeneration, pampered, mutiny, steerage, dabbler, rivulet, desiccated, tangible, trekking, macaw

Part Two (Chapters 6-10)

Summary

In 1896, Colonel Fawcett took a course to gain admission into The Royal Geographic society and be recognized a Society-approved explorer. He studied under Edward Ayearst Reeves, the chief instructor of surveying. Fawcett exemplified incredible natural ability right away, showing a predisposition for handling the society's odd techniques and devices such as theodolites, which measured the angle between the horizon and celestial bodies. The course instilled Fawcett with a need to record every sensual input during an exploration, a lesson he would practice the rest of his life during his forays into the Amazon. Fawcett learned about the harsh practicalities of survival, “everything from how to make pillows out of mud to choosing the best pack animals” (71) in the wild. He learned about dangerous beasts, diseases, and tribes, along with how to interact with indigenous tribes- and how to kill if necessary. Fawcett passed his final exam with flying colors and was admitted to the society.

In 1905, the president of the Royal Geographic Society, Sir George Tubman Goldie, gave Fawcett his first major exploration mission. He was tasked to map the borders between Bolivia, Peru, and Brazil. It was an extremely dangerous job and no one had yet succeeded. Fawcett agreed, believing, “Destiny intended me to go, so there could be no other answer!” (83). Fawcett was paired up with a surveyor named Arthur John Chivers. They embarked on their mission, only to have the Brazilian government cut their funding when they arrived. As they began their journey into the jungle with supplies and pack animals, a sense of disillusion set in. Fawcett was blown away by the poor conditions of the frontier town and how the local tribes had been enslaved, raped, and killed by rubber barons.

Fawcett, Chivers, and a party of desperadoes traveled downriver. They were blown away by the sizes of anacondas and other creatures. Six months into their expedition, gnats plagued them day and night, they were hungry and thirsty, and many men contracted fevers. Fearing they would be attacked by native tribes one night, Fawcett made his party promise not to shoot any indigenous people, even when they found one of Fawcett's scouts killed by arrows. Unlike his men, who were slowly unravelling, Fawcett wrote of himself, “the healthy person was regarded as a freak, an exception, extraordinary” (100). Despite the hellish exploration, Fawcett completed his route in 1907, redefining South American borders a year ahead of schedule.

Fawcett soon returned to the Amazon with a new partner, Frank Fisher, to find the source of the Rio Verde. They set out to Corumbá and cruised along rapids. The exploration proved treacherous, with mud, bees, and an inhospitable climate dogging them at every step. Deep into the jungle, Fawcett's men broke down and ate their rations early. They soon starved. Unable to find much food for a month, the men were on the brink of death. Fawcett was worried they would mutiny. Finally, he shot a deer

and they ate it, but some were too sick and died. A skeletal Fawcett returned to La Paz, Bolivia, with his mission completed at the cost of several lives.

In the author's 2007 account, he prepares for his journey into the Amazon. He visits a small shop in Manhattan catering to hikers, off-road bikers, and extreme sports junkies. The store clerk is enthusiastic about his journey. The author is reminded of how one Fawcett seeker classified people who reacted to news of his journey, “There were the Prudent…the Wise…the Very Wise…the Romantic…the Envious…the Practical” (77). He identifies the store clerk as a Romantic until he learns the author has almost zero outdoors experience. The clerk then becomes The Practical, suggesting gadgets and advice for surviving against animals.

The author then travels to one of Colonel Fawcett's last surviving relatives, Rolette de Montet-Guerin, who lives in Cardiff, Wales. The author hopes to learn more about Z. Rolette and her daughter are accommodating despite how her grandmother had been hounded for years after Fawcett's disappearance. Over lunch, Rolette eventually admits that Fawcett left a fake trail to Z to mislead any would-be followers from finding the city before him. The author is shocked how many Fawcett seekers looked in the wrong place. Rolette then allows the author to take a look at her chest of Fawcett's belongings. It is a treasure trove including journals and old letters. Fawcett's diaries portray him as a man increasingly fixated and obsessive about Z. The author discovers the true coordinates for Fawcett's starting place in his search for Z, an area called Dead Horse Camp.

Analysis

Chapters 6-10 show how the author will structure the rest of the book. After a preliminary introduction to Colonel Fawcett and his disappearance in the first five chapters, the author rewinds the clock and recounts Fawcett's very first expeditions. The author accomplishes a few things with this structural decision; it makes for thriller-like suspense and a need to keep turning the pages, withholding the final answer for the end of the book. The author's own personal chapters preparing for his journey are also enhanced by reading about Fawcett's adventures first. The reader gets a sense for the danger the author is woefully unprepared to face. By contrasting Fawcett's swashbuckling adventures in the infernal Amazon with his own mundane trip shopping for camping supplies in Manhattan, the reader's sense of dread for the author is increased. This fear is also compounded with the prologue in the opening which was left on a cliff-hanger. In this regard, the book's structure resembles fiction more than non-fiction. The author's choice to use past tense in Fawcett's chapters weaves a novelistic approach into the storytelling. The effect is reading about Fawcett's exploits as if they were fictional, yet the events described are enhanced by the knowledge they were real.

Chapters 6-10 explores themes of mankind's struggle against the brutality of nature. The author writes, “In the Amazon, Fawcett marveled, the animals kingdom “is against man as it is nowhere else in the world” (94). The author characterizes the rainforest as a constant fight for survival, a hell on earth far from the romanticized image often depicted

by the rest of the world. The expeditions are a study in the many ways a man can be killed by his own environment, from the infectious diseases to gnats to typical predators. Fawcett's drive to conquer the most inhospitable territory on earth represents humanity's eternal need to conquer its natural surroundings. The Royal Geographic Society is emblematic of that need; its ranks are filled with those speculating about the wonders of the rest of the world when there were still wonders to be discovered at the turn of the twentieth century. Through Fawcett, the RGS, and the many who followed in Fawcett's footsteps including the author, the book shows how curiosity is an inherent trait of men and women; the blank space on a map needs to be filled- even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds and sure death. The dead members of Fawcett's party is a stark example of how humanity dominated the earth throughout history. Civilization's foundation was laid with the bodies of the bold.

These chapters also deal with the many different ways the rest of the world relates to the explorers of society. The author draws a juxtaposition between his interactions with a store clerk and Fawcett's great fanfare and send-offs. For most people, the visceral thrill of exploration will never be met and so they live through explorers vicariously. The author even details this trend with the many possible reactions people tend to have towards explorers, as shown in the Manhattan extreme hobby store. Some are passionate while others wish they could come along. As reader will come to be seen in later chapters, this vicarious need will be exemplified most by Nina.

Vocabulary

cobblestoned, omnibuses, dais, portico, tenacious, innate, regale, obtuse, sextant, glaciation, fledgling, obstinacy, merriment, lethargy, quartz, hemorrhaging, imprimatur, translucent, profusely, emboldened

Part Three (Chapters 11-15)

Summary

After a second expedition into the jungle, Fawcett pined for civilization. He wrote in his journal, “I wanted to forget atrocities, to put slavery, murder and horrible disease behind me, and to look again at respectable old ladies whose ideas of vice ended with the indiscretions of so-and-so's housemaid” (115). Fawcett came back to find Jack grown and his youngest son Brian looking at him like a stranger. His family was thrilled to be reunited with him, but before long, Fawcett grew restless. He soon had a complete reversal of his initial homesickness and began to long for the Amazon. He set out once again only a few months later. He explored for the better part of next decade, neglecting his family much of the time.

Fawcett's family was quite poor while he was away. Nina often tried to get her husband to bring her into the wild, but he never consented. Early twentieth century misogyny held her back from joining The Royal Geographic Society. Although Nina was a strong supporter of women's rights and had her own thirst for adventure, she was Fawcett's number one devotee. She always sung his praises to her friends and in public. She also put her faith in Jack, believing she would live out her dreams through him when he came of age.

In Britain, Fawcett began to take on a mythological status. The idea of English masculinity had been threatened in post World War Two London, owed to the fading reach of its once-powerful empire. Fawcett provided a role model for boys and men. His incredible constitution was the stuff of legend; while others grew sick and suffered accidents in the Amazon, Fawcett was nearly invincible. But his same strength was also his greatest flaw; Fawcett despised weakness in other men. The author states, “the very things that made Fawcett a greater explorer-- demonic fury, single-mindedness, and an almost divine sense of immortality-- also made him terrifying to be with. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of his object-- or destiny” (123).

In 1911, Fawcett teamed up with a polar explorer named James Murray on an Amazonian expedition that would prove to be disastrous. Murray had come highly recommended from the Royal Geographic Society and it was thought their partnership was a perfect match. Soon into their trip accompanied by other explorers, Murray and Fawcett came to despise each other. Murray had been unprepared for the grueling nature of the Amazon; he got lost, ate most of his rations, shirked duty, and came down with sickness where maggots infested his knee and arm. Fawcett hated his weakness. Murray hated Fawcett's tyrannical leadership, relentless pace, and lack of empathy. As they starved months in, the party began to think Murray would succumb to illness and die. Fawcett went against his own training and detoured to the nearest outpost to save Murray's life. They found a frontiersman with a mule who brought Murray back to the civilization and saved his life. Fawcett returned home and found Murray had bad-mouthed him to the Royal Geographic Society. Their fight became public and continued

outside the Amazon. It was unclear wether they ever apologized to each other. Murray eventually joined an ill-fated scientific expedition to the Arctic where he led a mutiny against the captain. He escaped with other mutineers into the barren snow and was never seen again.

The author explains how Fawcett came to believe in Z. Fawcett's belief was not an epiphany, it developed over time. During Fawcett's interactions with native South Americans, he began to appreciate their intelligence and believed they had secrets. “One day, while staying with a tribe of Echojas in the Bolivian region of the Amazon, Fawcett stumbled across further evidence that seemed to contradict the prevailing notion that the jungle was a death-trap” (152). He began to discover shards of pottery on his journeys, hinting at a once-great civilization. Fawcett remembered accounts of Spanish conquistadores who told stories of formidable temples and cities when they came to the New World.

The author states how historians have disregarded these claims as impossible due to the region's dangerous climate, but Fawcett was convinced. The author also notes how prejudice played a major part in early twentieth century conceptions of South America. In 1911, the discovery of Machu Picchu emboldened Fawcett. He developed the theory of a hidden sophisticated city.

The author tells the story of Gonzalo Pizarro, a brutal conquistador who journeyed into the heart of the Amazon to find El Dorado in 1541, the mythical golden city. Pizarro slaughtered and enslaved hundreds of natives, he drove the majority of his men to death, and he never found the golden city. They nevertheless wrote of incredible sights, including major cities and roads.

The author also briefly touches on Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice, a well-to-do American explorer and Fawcett's rival. Thanks to his affluence, Rice had the means to explore the Amazon with the latest technology and airplanes. Fawcett was embittered to Rice and thought his river journeys were easier than what Fawcett considered to be genuine exploration.

In 2007, the author explained his travel plan to his wife. He told her he was going to enter the Xingu River and retrace Fawcett's steps from the coordinates he received from Rolette de Montet-Guerin. He later landed in Sao Paulo and went to see James Lynch, the explorer who was once captured trying to lead a Fawcett expedition. The author finishes Lynch's previous tale, explaining he and his son were ransomed from the native abductors with expensive gifts. James said, “You know, I had a lot of romantic notions about the jungle and this kind of finished that” (144). The author then received advice from Lynch for his own Fawcett quest.

Analysis

The author approaches The Lost of Z as a genuine mystery in chapters 11-15, using a journalistic method to investigate the possibility the city might be real. While not veering

too far into skepticism or blind credibility, the author examines both sides of the argument on Z's existence. He uses many archaeological contemporary accounts to argue against the possibility of a mythic kingdom existing. He re-introduces the concept of environmental determinism brought up in the first five chapters, a theory that posits a civilization can only grow if the surrounding environment permits. As the Amazon is rife with inhospitable criteria, Fawcett's contemporary archaeologists argue no great civilization could have thrived in the Amazon without being killed off. The author also makes reference to the scientists who decried Fawcett as an amateur. It is both interesting trivia and an unbiased examination of the book's main figure. On the other side of the argument, the author notes how Fawcett repeatedly discovered shards of pottery and other cultural signs that should not have existed in the Amazon. Machu Picchu's discovery also lends credence to Fawcett's argument. It is also worth noting how much of a mystery that Amazon remained to the world in the early twentieth century. As the book goes on to show, there is still much about it that remains undiscovered. With vast jungles left to be charted in Fawcett's era, it was not unthinkable to believe there were many substantial secrets to be found.

Nina emerges as both a source of endless devotion and a testament to Fawcett's familial neglect. Time and again, she encouraged Fawcett as he went adventuring months at a time. Tragically repressed by her era, Nina was forced to sit on the sidelines and assume a typical matriarchal duty. Fawcett pursued his own goals without considering the needs of his family or even providing for them very much while he was gone. Nina's devotion was made more tragic by how much she supported Fawcett despite the way he neglected her and his family. She is presented as yearning to join Fawcett on his quest, but he refused to bring a woman along - even his beloved. The author presents the situation as Fawcett becoming the vessel for all the hopes and dreams Nina could never realize in a profoundly misogynistic world. Nina's same hopes were eventually transferred to her and Fawcett's son Jack as he came of age.

Also, the conflict between Murray and Fawcett shows how man is reduced to his most primal form through extreme exploration. When the Fawcett-Murray expedition encounters disaster, it is suggested Murray stole and tried to shirk duty. The author is careful to also balance that account with the revelation that Fawcett was a brutal overseer and drove men to the point of collapse. Fawcett pursued Z with obsessiveness, believing it was his destiny. As the author states, “the very things that made Fawcett a greater explorer-- demonic fury, single-mindedness, and an almost divine sense of immortality-- also made him terrifying to be with. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of his object-- or destiny” (123). Murray, not motivated by the same sense of destiny, was therefore an added obstacle in the jungle. The jungle then proved to be a forge where their strongest traits emerged. Murray's was his apparent selfishness and weakness; Fawcett's was his brutality.

The idea that the jungle pushes explorers toward their natural bent is also prevalent in the book's treatment of race. Evil conquistadores who were cruel by nature found slaves in the wild and drove the natives to their death. For Fawcett, the jungle provided disillusionment from his prior conceptions of undignified and unintelligent natives. He gave reports how they were often misunderstood. Despite his awakening, Fawcett,

“escaped every pathology in the jungle but could not escape the pernicious disease of race" (159). He was still a product of his era and believed the white European man to be superior to savages.

Vocabulary

tributaries, patchwork, forthcoming, jostling, tolling, fiendish, compulsions, unaccustomed, staunchly, spurred, fortnight, exacerbated, asunder, counterpoint, blitz, forethought, immunity, predicated, autodidactic, antithesis

Part Four (Chapters 16-20)

Summary

In 1914, Fawcett emerged from the jungle to find out the world was at war. He answered the call of duty and was placed in charge of a battery of 200 men. The battlefield offered horrors the like he had never encountered in the jungle. The Battle of Somme was a particularly brutal bloodbath. Fawcett was held in high regards for his bravery and endurance in rough conditions, which he honed from his time in the jungle. As a couple years passed, Fawcett feared Dr. Rice would find Z before him. During this time Fawcett was distinguished with the Royal Geographical Society's Founder's Medal for his lifelong efforts, which was the dream of his life according to Nina.

When the war was over, Fawcett felt extreme disillusionment. He returned home and was stunned how much his kids grew up, but Jack was still not ready to accompany him on his mission, despite the boy's constant training. Fawcett began to map his path to Z. Others in the scientific establishment derided him and considered him an amateur for believing in El Dorado. Fawcett then moved his family to Jamaica, where it was cheaper to live. Jack's friend Raleigh's family also moved there. At night, both boys dreamed of adventure.

Fawcett petitioned the Brazilian government for money. Dr. Rice was in the jungle, using a massive portable radio to listen to live events while exploring, a first in the field of exploration. Rice's success at finding artifacts scared Fawcett, who thought he was getting closer to Z. Fawcett met with the president of Brazil, Epitácio Pessoa, and a general, Cândido Rondon. Fawcett made his case for funding while Rondon made trouble, arguing for Brazilians to come along. President Pessoa agreed to fund an expedition into the Amazon with Brazilians on the team. Fawcett enlisted a crew and vowed to find Z to the RGS before plunging into the jungle. After misfortune struck, Fawcett had to return, defeated. Fawcett then gambled the rest of his savings to try another expedition, and emerged three months later having failed again.

Fawcett allowed Jack to finally come. Nina raised no objections, vicariously living through her son as well now. Jack agreed, getting Raleigh to come too. The RGS could not fund Fawcett, and having spent his soldier's pension, he was bankrupt. The family descended into poverty. They moved to England in an old ramshackle house. As they scraped by, Fawcett became surly and difficult to be around, anxious to start his next adventure. Rice was mounting a new expedition with an airplane. Fearing Rice would finally find Z, Fawcett grew worse. Fawcett made the acquaintance of British War correspondent George Lynch, who promised to secure financing in America where banks were flush and Fawcett's name carried weight. Three days later, he had done it; Lynch had secured financing for Fawcett from several donors and sold his story rights to a coalition of newspapers. Fawcett set out to America with Jack and Raleigh, although the other son Brian was devastated to be left behind. Fawcett hoped to finally receive, “the honour of immortality” (219).

Fawcett, Jack, and Raleigh left New York to great fanfare. People celebrated their adventure wherever they went and the boys were bursting with excitement. They traveled to Rio de Janeiro and journeyed into the interior of the jungle, but a week-long dull boat ride downriver quelled their excitement. They finally entered the jungle, where the boys struggled to keep up with Fawcett. The explorer veteran set a grueling pace they could barely match despite his age. Raleigh grew sick, feverish, and sullen. Soon all he desired was to go home. Jack began to resent his friend, thinking he was only interested in superficial things like Hollywood. Fawcett encouraged Raleigh to turn back at a native outpost but Raleigh would not. In Fawcett's final letter to his wife, he wrote, “You need have no fear of any failure” (245).

In Rio, the author visited an archive where Fawcett's last manuscript was stored. Many had tried to read it, but were rebuffed. The Brazilian librarian showed it to the author since he came all the way down. Poring over it, he discovered drawings of hieroglyphics Fawcett encountered along his journey, reassembling the ones in his other journals. The author then solicited a guide to help him enter the Xingu River, Paulo Pinage. Paulo explained it would require elaborate negotiation with tribal leaders to get access. They set off to retrace Fawcett's steps towards finding Z, the first time any Fawcett seeker had the right coordinates.

Analysis

The narrative takes a detour here to deal with Fawcett's experience in World War II, drawing a parallel between war and the Amazon. In his gritty accounts of the war, Fawcett may as well be recounting his time in the jungle; both offered similar peril, senseless loss of life, and brutal living conditions. This parallel is clear when Fawcett's austere training in the wild adequately prepared him for the soldier's life, later earning him many decorations.

The war and Amazon comparison also flips European ideals on its head, specifically the never-questioned European mentality of racial superiority. The author writes, “It was the greatest loss of life in the history of the British military, and many in the West began to portray the “savage” as European rather than some native in the jungle” (187). Fawcett's resulting disillusion made him see that the barbaric actions of native tribes paled in comparison to previously unthinkable brutalities that “civilized” Europeans committed. As the author notes, it challenged every preconceived of superiority. Fawcett, quoting a colleague, wrote that cannibalism, “at least provides a reasonable motive for killing a man, which is more than you can say for civilized warfare” (187). For all their knowledge and refinement, Europeans were no better than the tribes they once looked down on.

The book argues obsession stems from the hunt for glory. For years, the desire for glory found no better lure than in the Amazon, an uncharted counterfeit paradise where the promise of untold discovery might be found around any bend. After the war, every penny to Fawcett's name was used in the goal of finding Z. His family suffered financially while he financed one failed expedition after the other. The author points out how Fawcett's

believed he would have “the honour of immortality” (219). Fawcett's belief in his own destiny fueled his obsession. Like a religious fanatic, he was willing to endure incredible deprivation with the belief that he would be rewarded for his efforts. As Fawcett himself noted, “loneliness is not intolerable when enthusiasm for a quest fills the mind” (208). He showed little regard for his family's financial wellbeing or even their wounded feelings when they were not taken along. All obsession throughout the book is fueled by this same thinking. The author also believed on his trip that he would be rewarded for uncovering the truth about Fawcett that eluded researchers for many years.

Invariably, this pattern of sky-high expectation is met with disaster, shown through the same cycle in the book, Many explorers are given a send-off with great fanfare only to meet death or failure. The author notes how the young boys dreamed of their adventures in a naive manner, not knowing the dangers that lay ahead. They soak in the limelight, assured of their inevitable victory. Raleigh's subsequent breakdown early on goes to show how ill-prepared he really was for the trials of their journey. The author writes, “they were sure that the journey would make them rich and famous, but their fantasies remained more those of boys than men” (231). Although Raleigh seems to be exceptionally naive, the same could be said for Fawcett, who is similarly assured of victory despite his years of experience. It could be argued they are all naive. But what separates the explorers from the rest of the world is knowing the risk and doing it anyway. Fawcett and his party are nothing if not bold.

Vocabulary

seeped, amid, grandiose, viceroy, insatiable, decipherable, vista, causeway, chivalrous, catalyst, promiscuously, hamlet, bombardment, placid, purgatory, brigade, occult, acute, rigorous, tantalizing, hyperborean

Part Five (Chapters 21-25)

Summary

In the 1920s, the world eagerly waited for news of Fawcett. Years went by with no information. The mysteries abounded and major rescue efforts were launched. Nina refused to believe Fawcett was dead. Newspaper coalitions sponsored the rescue effort of George Miller Dyott, a 45-year-old RGS member. His expedition used radio to communicate with the outside world while he was in the Amazon. He eventually emerged, exhausted and spent, with the story that “Fawcett expedition perished at the hands of Indians” (268). His story soon fell apart as many thought it was a lie. More missionaries and explorers tried to find Fawcett, but many of them died. A 52-year-old English actor, Albert de Winton, tried to find Fawcett and got kidnapped by wild tribes. As the years dragged on, most believed Fawcett had perished except for Nina. By the 1950s, she still believed they would emerge.

Over the years, Nina turned to spiritualism to seek closure over Fawcett. A medium once told her that Fawcett said, “Can't you see that I'm alive?” (294). Other mediums claimed Fawcett was dead, which Nina dismissed. The one Fawcett son not brought along on the expedition, Brian, published a book about his father in 1953. He then went on his own expedition in the Amazon, believing his brother Jack may still be alive. He flew over the jungle in an airplane and dropped pamphlets down for Jack, but left with no success. Nina and Brian died never knowing.

The book shifts to the author's narrative. He left Cuiabá and entered the rainforest. It had been ravaged by deforestation. Paulo showed him an illusion of rocky formation that reassembled a city, and the author supposed it may have confused sixteenth century explorers into thinking it was a city. They reached Bakairi Post, a small outpost with native tribes. The author met an older woman, one of the last to see Fawcett's party come through when she was a little girl. She said that Fawcett and the boys went into hostile native territory despite warnings not to travel there.

In a hotel bordering Bakairi Post, in Canarana, Paulo introduced the author to several men of the Xingu tribes, including the Kalapalo chief, Vajuvi. They wanted gifts for information about Fawcett, which they claimed to have. After a negotiation, they let the author's party into the Xingu and promised to reveal the truth about Fawcett. They went into the jungle to find the village. Along the way, the author got lost while lugging his equipment and he briefly succumbed to despair. He heard noises and believed he was going to be attacked by a wild tribe, but it was only village children who had found him. They brought him to the village. There, the author saw many naked tribespeople, some dancing and celebrating a ritual day. Vajuvi brought them down to the river the next day, to a place called the green lagoon. Piranhas nipped at their boat and Vajuvi fished a few out of the water. Vajuvi revealed that nearby was the place where his grandfather's bones once were; the villagers handed them to the authorities and lied that they were

Fawcett's bones in exchange for a reward. The author knew it corroborated the findings that the bones presented years ago were not Fawcett's.

The author then detailes some of the mystics and cult following around Fawcett's disappearance. Some believed Fawcett traveled to another dimension in the jungle and achieved a transcendence. The author continued his own journey trying to find Fawcett but had no luck. Beaten down by the harsh conditions of the Amazon and fighting with Paulo, he called his wife via satellite phone and had an emotional conversation. He wanted to go home. They traveled to another Xingu village to meet Michael Heckenberger, an eminent anthropologist from the University of Florida also out in the Amazon. Heckenberger had been living in the Xingu for a long period of time, even coming to live in his own hut. Heckenberger also had a fascination with Fawcett, and upon hearing the author's story, brought the party into the jungle nearby to show them something.

The ground had remnants of a once-great village; there was clear evidence of moats, causeways, palisades, roads, and buildings. Everything was aligned geometrically once the evidence was unearthed from the soil. It was all gone now because it was built with organic material, making it impossible to find unless you knew where to look. Fawcett was right, but looking for something he could never see. Heckenberger had written on the subject extensively. The author states, “other archaeologists and geographers later described them [the findings] to me as “monumental,” “transformative,” and “earth-shattering”” (314). Many tribes were wiped out by European holocausts, disease, and war. The author supposes that is why so many think no great civilization could ever have survived in the Amazon, thinking what the present was all there ever was. The author, Heckenberger, and Paulo return to the village for a celebration. The author writes, “For a moment, I could see this vanished world as if it were right in front of me. Z” (319).

Analysis

The last chapters brings one of the book's major messages to the fore: the painful nature of never having answers. Mystery without resolution is a major through-line in the whole book: Fawcett wanted to know if Z is real; Nina wanted to know what happened to Fawcett, Jack, and Raleigh; the author wants to know the answers to both these questions. Nobody gets an answer. As the author himself admits during the hardest leg of his expedition, “The finished story of Fawcett seemed to reside eternally beyond the horizon: a hidden metropolis of words and paragraphs, my own Z” (303). Besides the hunt for glory, obsession is driven by the insatiable need to prove the truth about something. In that sense, every major player in the book can be said to have a “Z”. Fawcett became Nina's Z, as she refused to accept his death even until her own.

The obsessive need to prove the truth about their individual mysteries is galvanized by a personal need to prove something about themselves, the author demonstrates. Fawcett's need to discover Z was about more than just glory; he wanted to legitimize himself in front of his peers and validate his life's work. Nina lived through Fawcett

vicariously, and so he was in effect her life's work. His sudden disappearance and its subsequent lack of closure made Nina unable to close the chapter on that life, because it was where she derived personal meaning from for so long. But as the illusory rocky formations mistaken for stone cities show, these goals might only be mirages. During the author's encounters with these formations during first foray in the Amazon, Paulo says, “It [the rocks] were made by nature, by erosion. But many people who see it think it is a lost city, like Z” (248). It is heartbreaking to accept the possibility someone's life's work could be all for naught, and so it becomes easier to blindly forge ahead and be deaf to reason. As Brian Fawcett later noted after his own failed quest to find his brother, “the whole romantic structure of fallacious beliefs, already rocking dangerously, collapsed about me, leaving me dazed (…) Was it possible that three lives had been lost for an objective that never existed?” (299). Brian, having been shunned by his father's adventure from a young age, is much better at offering an objective viewpoint, from seeing the truth about father's death to realizing Z probably never existed. His obsessive family cannot see the same thing.

Despite the possible failure of their dreams, the author counterbalances with the last major theme of the work: there is an invisible world all around that cannot be seen, left to be discovered. The author's journey to the Xingu and his encounter with Michael Heckenberger provided a spiritual validation of Colonel Fawcett's quest. The author was shown the remnants of a once-great civilization like Z, just like the conquistadores must have seen upon their arrival in The New World. It calls into question every pre-conceived notion of The Amazon, as Fawcett once sought to do. The theory of environmental determinism is not as iron-clad as scientists would like to believe; there exists many hidden treasures and mysteries left to be found in the jungle, and in the world. It recalls the Royal Geographical Society and its own sense of wonder at what possibilities lie within the blank section of the map titled “uncharted." The Lost City of Z ends with a validation of mystery and adventure.

Vocabulary

communal, erosion, ridge, drought, torrent, capitalize, elephantiasis, tapir, wizened, indignation, perpetrated, invulnerable, rugged, primeval, edict, denizens, gangrenous, emaciated, deterrent, entreated

Important People

Colonel Fawcett

Colonel Fawcett was a larger-than-life English explorer who lived at the turn of the century. Said to be one of the last great Victorian explorers, Fawcett helped map the Peru-Bolivian border and conducted many perilous expeditions into the uncharted Amazon throughout his lifetime. He believed there was a sophisticated ancient society hidden deep in the Amazon, which he called “The City of Z.” Fawcett made it his life's quest to discover “Z” even though his contemporary archaeologists and scientists dismissed the notion such a city could exist in the jungle. Fawcett mysteriously disappeared on his last journey to track down “Z,” along with his son, Jack, and Jack's friend, Raleigh Rimell. Fawcett's disappearance has sparked a century's worth of speculation, begging questions about what happened to him and whether he ever found The Lost City of Z. These questions provide the basis for the entire book.

Fawcett grew up in Victorian Britain where his every natural inclination was stifled. Forced to repress himself in a prim and proper society, Fawcett pined for the outdoors and adventure. He found solace in extraordinary adventure novels, such as the ones his brother Edward would later write. The era's repressive standards coupled with a neglectful upbringing would come to shape Fawcett's life as an explorer. He would also later neglect his family in much the same he was ignored by his father as a child. One of the most interesting paradoxes about Fawcett's figure is that most of his life's is defined by the search for a lost society when he is a man who cannot function in any society. He bitterly resented civilized society's repressive conventions compared to the freedom of the jungle. This is most prevalent in his relationship with Nina. When he was around, Fawcett took out all his frustrations on her and his family. Nevertheless, their love was real and Nina remained Fawcett's diehard devotee-- even years after his disappearance.

Finally, Fawcett had a near-religious belief in his own destiny. He believed fate wanted him to find the Lost City of Z. Despite shunning much of the world, Fawcett still craved its approval and validation. His colleagues' rejections gave him something to prove, especially since he felt he was the one on the front-lines taking on the dangers of wilderness while most of the scientists stayed home. Fawcett's obsession and remarkably strong constitution gave him the endurance to withstand the Amazon's grueling climate, but it was also his worst trait. He was a nightmare for any explorer who did not live up to his exacting standards. He despised weakness in all men who were not as strong as he was. His strength was also his own weakness.

The Author (David Grann)

David Grann is an award-winning journalist, staff writer for The New Yorker, and a best-selling writer. His works focus on fascinating figures and events from world history that

remain largely unknown to mainstream audiences. His works are journalistic and comprehensive while also reading like page-turner novels. He strives to tell a good story, complete with suspense and cliffhangers, to keep his readers invested. Admittedly obsessive when researching a subject, Grann becomes immersed with whatever he is working on. He claims to see himself in Colonel Fawcett, possessing the same call of the wild that animated the great explorer. Grann calls this “the grip” and claims he inherited the trait from his grandfather.

The most notable element about Grann is that he inserts himself in the story itself. He retraces Fawcett's final steps into the jungle and chronicles the experience. He follows in the tradition of the many Fawcett seekers before him and becomes a piece of Fawcett history himself. A full reading of Fawcett's history then includes David Grann himself because he uncovered so much of the mystery that eluded so many for so long. His research and interviews manage to unearth never-before-seen journals and clues to Fawcett's last whereabouts.

Grann is a fascinating figure because he is the reader's proxy. He's a stand-in for any layperson first discovering the secrets of the Amazon along with him. A self-described homebody who prefers to take the elevator rather than the stairs, Grann's lack of experience lends another aspect of fascination to the whole piece: how will the cushy author himself fare in the world's most demanding climate? Grann knows how to exact the most drama from these questions. Many of his chapters hinge on the questions of his own success in the jungle, about whether he will break or rise to the challenge.

Nina Fawcett

Nina was Percy Fawcett's wife and Jack's mother. An ambassador's daughter, Nina met Fawcett while he was stationed in Ceylon (formerly Sri Lanka) at a military gathering. Nina was an open feminist and freethinker at a time when such things were considered scandalous. She married another man before Fawcett, but her heart always belonged to the man she met in Ceylon. When her husband died prematurely, he told her to marry Fawcett.

Over the course of her life, Nina was Fawcett's foremost supporter. She lauded his adventures in public and private. She had also always wanted to journey into the Amazon but her husband and the Royal Geographical Society would not let her, owing to the time's sexist policies. Nina instead put her hopes and dreams in Jack; she lived vicariously through him and her husband. She likened her marriage to a sailor's wife. In letters to friends, she described long periods of neglect and loneliness interspersed with fighting. She endured financial and emotional hardships in service to Fawcett's dream at a time when divorce was not an option.

She refused to accept the deaths of her family even years after they fail to return from the jungle. Nina's obsessive conviction that they were still alive mirrored Fawcett's single-minded drive to find “Z.” Having put all her ambitions and dreams into the mean of her family, Nina was never able to accept the lack of closure from their

disappearance. She died never know what happened to them but still believing they were alive.

Jack Fawcett

Jack Fawcett was Percy's first son. He accompanied his father on his last expedition into the Amazon along with his best friend, Raleigh Rimell, when they mysteriously vanished for good. Jack looked up to his father his whole life and wanted to be just like him. Ever since he was a boy, he trained to become an explorer too. He lived an ascetic lifestyle; he abstained from meat and alcohol and trained physically every day. Convinced of his future fame and success, Jack ventured into the Amazon with the certainty he would find “Z.” Although his conviction was perhaps naive, Jack was well-trained for the expedition unlike his best friend. Jack is proof of the cyclical nature of obsession and how it can be passed down from generation to generation.

Raleigh Rimell

Raleigh Rimell was Jack Fawcett's best friend and a member of the infamous final Fawcett expedition that vanished. A charming and handsome boy, Raleigh had dreams of being a Hollywood movie star before he joined the expedition. It was another avenue to fame for him. Like his friend Jack, Raleigh was convinced their fortunes would be made in the jungle and they would be rocketed to superstardom. Raleigh was unprepared for the rigors of the jungle and grew weak and sullen only weeks after starting their quest. His early disillusion speaks to the book's themes about the dangers of obsession and self-certainty.

James Lynch

James Lynch is a Brazilian banker and one of the most famous Fawcett seekers of all time. Following in a long tradition of Fawcett seekers, Lynch ventured into the Amazon with his son to discover the mystery of what happened to Fawcett. His kidnapping and near-death experience are a microcosm for what many Fawcett seekers endured. Assured of their success, they are often met with shock and failure. Lynch and his son also reflect the book's message of how the “call of the wild” can be passed down from father to son. Like Fawcett and Jack, James Lynch inspired his son too.

Michael Heckenberger

Michael Heckenberger is a University of Florida anthropologist who researches pre-industrial complex societies such as ancient Amazonian cultures. The author encounters Michael Heckenberger on his own trip into the Xingu River. Heckenberger leads the author to the ruins of an ancient Amazonian city that housed hundreds and had streets and causeways. Heckenberger's discoveries revolutionized how scientists view the ancient Amazon. He acts as the book's vindication of Fawcett's mission;

although The Lost City of Z is never located, Fawcett was correct that an ancient sophisticated society could flourish within the harsh jungle.

Dr. Rice

Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice was an affluent American physician and Amazonian explorer. He was Fawcett's chief rival although the book provides no record of the two ever meeting. Dr. Rice was a threat to Fawcett because he had much more manpower and funding and could have discovered an ancient society like “Z” before Fawcett. Dr. Rice was a trailblazer in Amazonian exploration; he used the first ever radio in the field and imported large ships to navigate the Amazon's treacherous waters. Dr. Rice represents the Amazonian gold rush of Fawcett's day and the many would-be famous explorers who made a name for themselves by mapping the last black spots of the globe.

James Murray

James Murray was a biologist and arctic explorer who joined Fawcett on an ill-fated expedition into the Amazon. Recommended to Fawcett by the Royal Geographical Society, Murray nevertheless proved to be a terrible match for the infamous Amazonian explorer, as Murray's arctic training never prepared him for the harsh and humid conditions of the jungle. Murray was a stand-in for the many men who Fawcett saw as “weak” because they could not keep up with his extraordinary endurance and constitution. Murray was accused of shirking duty and stealing rations. Murray believed Fawcett lacked empathy for anyone who did not share his obsessive goals. Though a flawed figure, Murray provided a window into Fawcett's complexities and shortcomings.

Vajuvi

Vajuvi is a Xingu tribe chief that the author met during his journey into the jungle. In exchange for payment, Vajuvi promised to reveal the truth about Colonel Fawcett. He revealed his tribe lied about finding Fawcett's bones in the past. Vajuvi serves to underscore how futile it is to search for answers about Fawcett's fate. His passages in the book are linked to its key themes of lack of closure.

Objects/Places

The Amazon

For many in the book, the Amazon represents the means to achieving an obsessive need for glory and adventure. During Fawcett's time at the turn of the century, the Amazon was still an uncharted wonderland whose greatest secrets had not yet been discovered. Fawcett saw the brutal South American jungles as both a feat to be conquered and the path to realizing his destiny as an explorer. Many Fawcett seekers saw similar promises in the Amazon's depths, and they sought to be the ones to find out the truth about Fawcett and achieve a form of immortality through fame. The author himself investigates Fawcett's disappearance for similar reasons. However, the Amazon posed incredible danger; its native tribes and deadly ecosystem worked to ensnare those naive enough to enter it unprepared.

The Lost City of Z

The mythical El Dorado-like kingdom is the main symbol of Fawcett's lifelong obsession. Fawcett believed a complex and sophisticated society he simply called “Z” existed somewhere hidden in the Amazon. Many of Fawcett's contemporary archaeologists and scientists dismissed the claim under the grounds of “environmental determinism," the belief an environment determines the society that sprouts up around it. No city could exist in the inhospitable jungle according to them. Discovering The Lost City of Z became Fawcett's obsession and a validation of his life's work. The author is also fascinated with validating the theory.

Royal Geographical Society

The RGS was a complex institution, fostering both enthusiasm in exploration and perpetuating prejudice around the world. The society financed impressive and important expeditions in furthering humanity's understanding of uncharted realms. However, it also helped spread negative attitudes and stereotypes toward indigenous populations, long considered inferior to the white man. The Royal Geographical Society is presented in this book as a symbol of entrenched nineteenth century sexism, barring women from its ranks for a long time. A product of its era, it performed both good work and problematic practices.

England

Fawcett's home in England with Nina and his children was a place of resentment for him. While he craved his family and society after languishing in the jungle for months on end, he just as quickly came to despise mundane European life for its lack of real thrill. As a boy in Victorian Britain, Fawcett was also forced to repress his natural inclination

for physical activity and exploration. Fawcett ignored his home for the majority of his adult life, seeing it mostly as a hindrance in his obsessive quest for Z.

World War One (Somme)

The European Theatre of World War One and specifically the Somme represent the hypocritical nature of Europe's superiority complex. Fawcett faced unspeakable horrors during the war, which is all the more shocking considering his life spent grappling with death in the jungle. The author marks a parallel between Fawcett's ensuing disillusionment and Europe's sense of superiority. Europe's indiscriminate mass murdering of its own made Fawcett no more noble than a savage.

Artifacts

The various artifacts Fawcett found in the jungle symbolize the book's message of undiscovered possibility. Fawcett's main reasons for believing in “Z” stemmed from finding pottery shards in the Amazon where none were supposed to exist, establishing his theory of a hidden sophisticated society. Although Fawcett was never entirely validated in his belief of “Z,” the shards are a reminder how often an era's beliefs can be wrong; major works of art in the Amazon were once not thought possible by the brightest minds of the day. The mere existence of Fawcett's artifacts prove how long-held theories of what's possible within the world constantly need to be challenged.

Fawcett's journals

Fawcett's journals act as a launching point for the author's personal quest, making the book a singular achievement in Colonel Fawcett biographies. The author managed to get a hold of Fawcett's remaining diaries, never-before-seen heirlooms guarded by Fawcett's descendants. This achievement gives the author an edge over all the Fawcett seekers of the twentieth century and arms him with more knowledge to embark on his own quest. It increases the book's suspense with the possibility that the author may actually solve the mystery, as well as solidifying the author as the singular authority on Colonel Fawcett.

Adventure Stories

Fawcett's life as an explorer was greatly shaped by the adventure stories of his youth. As a repressed boy in Victorian Britain, Fawcett found refuge in nineteenth century adventures stories like the ones his brother Edward penned or the works of Arthur Conan Doyle. The author argues that Fawcett's later career choices were informed by these works, and the explorer was trying to become the very protagonists he read about. Arthur Conan Doyle later befriend Fawcett and based the main character of The Lost World on Fawcett. It was a case of art imitating life and vice versa.

Dead Horse Camp

Dead Horse Camp poses a promise of finding the truth about what happened to Fawcett's ill-fated final exploration party. The site of Fawcett's final launching point into the jungle to find “Z,” the explorer guarded the information from everyone including his family. Its stated location is a lie until the author found its real coordinates in one of Fawcett's last journals. In finding the real Dead Horse Camp, the author has come closer to learning the truth about Fawcett than anyone in history.

Xingu Ruins

The Xingu River and its village provides a validation of Fawcett's long-held belief of a sophisticated society existing in the jungle. The author traveled to the remote reaches of the village in the Amazon where he encountered an anthropologist named Michael Heckenberger, who showed the author the remnants of a once-great city. Now destroyed by organic processes, the ruins are both a confirmation of Fawcett's belief and a testament to how much there is left to be discovered.

Themes

Obsession

The one constant that connects every major individual in the book is personal obsession. Writing from his own perspective, retelling the story of Colonel Fawcett up until the explorer's mysterious disappearance, and recounting the manifest misadventures of Fawcett's seekers, the author draws significant parallels between them all: every major player of the book is obsessive. The objects of their obsessions are varied, but the root motivations are the same; an obsessive need for glory and adventure.

Fawcett's obsessive need to find Z is rooted in his belief of his own destiny. He thought he was fated to be a great explorer and he would live on eternally in this fame. Coupled with his sense of adventure and abiding curiosity, it created a life marked by a decades-long obsession that saw his family and finances suffer all in the quest to achieve his dream. Fawcett's remarkable ability to endure in both the Amazon and World War One stemmed from his need to validate his obsession, and thus validating himself in the eyes of those who once thought he was an amateur.

Fawcett's relentless drive gave him incredible strength to push on in the wilderness where other men could not keep going. However, Fawcett's obsession was a double-edged sword; it gave him strength but made him despise weakness in other men. The ill-fated Murray expedition captures Fawcett's dichotomy. Fawcett was unable to sympathize with anyone who did not share his obsession. Fawcett's greatest strength was also his greatest source of agony- even to himself. While unable to return to his quest to find “Z” in the years after World War One, Fawcett once wrote, “undoubtedly obsession is the diagnosis of many cases of madness” (213). Fawcett was never at peace his whole life.

Fawcett and the explorers who followed him also share a common characteristic: the human desire to be “first.” For a long time, the uncharted Amazon offers the last bastion of “firsts,” with the nineteenth century world quickly being mapped out entirely. Fawcett's terrifying fear of Dr. Rice discovering “Z” before him is proof; he was as much motivated by glory as by curiosity.

The author is motivated by the same need to be on the front-lines of a fresh discovery. When he works on stories, he mentions how he can, “tend to lose sight of everything else. I forget to pay bills or to shave” (32). The author plunged headlong into the Amazon, as naive as many Fawcett seekers before him, hopeful he would not suffer the same fate.

Destiny

Many of the obsessive individuals that appear in the book have an unshakable believe in their own destiny. Nowhere is this more prevalent than with Fawcett himself, who frequently mentioned how finding “Z” was his personal destiny. Before his first expedition mapping the Bolivian border, Fawcett wrote, “Destiny intended me to go, so there could be no other answer!” (83). The certainty in his own destiny gave Fawcett the sense that nothing bad could happen to his party. Like a religious fanatic, Fawcett did not fear the many dangers of the Amazon the way other explorers did. He propelled headlong into probable death with his own son, certain of victory.

For Fawcett, destiny meant being immortalized. Before he set off on his last campaign with Jack and Raleigh never to return, Fawcett remarked he hoped to receive, “the honour of immortality” (219). He believed himself not only fated to find “Z,” but remembered for it eternally. While different themes of the work, destiny and obsession are linked; these two elements combined to convince Fawcett he was certainly going to be immortalized. The Fawcett seekers are often characterized the same way in the book; aside from their obsessiveness, they are assured of victory despite tremendous odds. They also believe in their own destiny, explaining how they could venture into the dangerous depths of the Amazon with the belief nothing terrible will really happen to them.

Jack and Raleigh were entitled in quite the same way; they had naive certainties of their success. Before the voyage, the boys would often would lie awake and discuss how the Amazon would make their dreams come true. They saw the adventure as a transaction: two years finding “Z” in exchange for eternal fame. There was never any real concern that they might fail or die. Raleigh's immediate breakdown is proof how tragically unprepared he was for the deprivations of the jungle. He sullenly found solace in Hollywood magazines, and this was only a few weeks into their journey. He admitted he wanted to turn home - a major about-face compared to his previous certainty in his own fate. While Fawcett was much more experienced, he was also similarly self-confident in their success. It was what lead him to plunge into hostile native territory despite all the warnings he received. Certain of his own destiny, Fawcett's boldness made for an intrepid spirit oblivious to his real limits. Like many great adventurers, he hard a mixture of bravery and naivety.

Lack of Closure/Never having answers

A main theme in the book is the extreme lengths people go to for answers and how people are unable to fundamentally deal with ambiguity. The mysteries at the heart of the book never remain answered-- what happened to Colonel Fawcett's party, and is the Lost City of Z real? For the reader, the lack of closure can make for a frustrating experience, but those personally involved in the events, the agony of not knowing is shown to be unbearable. The most devastating effects of lack of closure can be found in Nina, who remained in denial about her family's fate her whole life. She went to extreme

lengths to cope with their loss, finding solace in spiritualism and anyone who would agree with her improbable conviction that Fawcett and her son were still alive. She was never able to truly let go and accept the not knowing. Neither was Fawcett able to live without knowing if “Z” was real or not. Both were prisoners of their need for answers.

The world deals with Fawcett's disappearance in quite the same way; it became a source of incredible mystery. The lack of an answer has inspired a hundred explorers to plunge into the jungle themselves, often to fatal ends. The tantalizing question of whether “Z” was real or not continues to fascinate to this day, and the book's existence is testimony of that fact. Mystery has the obvious effect of piquing curiosity, yet its lack of closure is not entertaining as much as frustrating-- and for some, unbearable. The author himself, as he readily admits, is not immune to these questions; they inspire his entire book and even drove him to his own quest in the Amazon. The more he researched his topic, his need for answers hit a fever pitch, as it surely did for those personally connected to Fawcett in the twenties.

The Royal Geographical Society also is an emblem of humanity's innate desire for answers. Their organization was founded on curiosity and the desire to fill out the uncharted sections of the map. Its explorers were willing to gamble their lives to satisfy a primal urge for answers. Fawcett's mapping of the Bolivian border is a microcosm for the millions of untold heroes who died mapping the world. The book argues how people must come to accept ambiguity and the lack of closure. Usually there is no other option and by not doing so, people run the risk of trampling on their own sanity and health. The book ends with the seemingly paradoxical message of embracing ambiguity while also striving to discover more.

The Call of the Wild

Despite themes of obsession and destiny, the author argues people like Fawcett are specially touched by the call of the wild, meaning they have a natural wanderlust and curiosity and normal society stifles their spirit as it forces them to conform to repressive conventions. That is certainly true for Fawcett's childhood in Victorian Britain. The author writes Fawcett viewed life as, “a never-ending war against the physical forces surrounding him” (40). Naturally, he was attracted to the wild, which represented the polar opposite of Victorian London. Where England was ruled by rigid codes of conduct, the Amazon was the last bastion of untamed wilderness left in the world. It offered Fawcett an escape, as well as a superhuman challenge- exactly the right ingredients needed to satisfy his spirit.

Not only was Victorian Society a prison for Fawcett, so was regular home life with his wife and children. After only a month home from one of his expeditions, Fawcett wrote that village life was a, “prison gate slowly but surely shutting me in” (116). With his natural affinity for the wild, Fawcett neglected his wife and children to the point everyone was relieved when he was gone. His mood soured until he was back in nature, away from the rest of the world. His quest for a lost city therefore took on a complex and

tragic component. It posed the major paradox of this complex figure: he was a man searching for society, but he was unable to function in one.

The author remarks how he, too, is touched by the call of the wild, and speculates it may be the case for everyone. The Royal Geographical Society is the perfect emblem of this curiosity. Their entire society was founded on the desire to explore the globe. There was resentment between explorers and homebound scientists who felt left out. The book argues that wanderlust may be an innate need in people. The great fanfare and fascination that preluded Fawcett's last expedition and every search for him afterwards is a testament to the world's abiding fascination in adventure. A person's ability to fulfill this needs informs how they react to the author when he tells them about his plans to journey to the Amazon. The author remarks, “there were the Prudent…the Wise... the Very Wise… the Romantic…the Envious…the Practical” (77). These are the various ways people react depending on their character, some are jealous while others are enthusiastic, but none are indifferent. The author purports that the call of the wild touches something in deep in every person and stirs strong emotions.

The Unseen World

A major message of the book is that unseen worlds are still waiting to be discovered. The Lost City of Z is the clearest encapsulation of this idea. While “Z” is never discovered, its potential existence is vindicated at the discovery of the Xingu ruins at the very end of the book. The final message is that it could have existed at some point. That leaves the door open for challenging many widely-held beliefs in what secrets are still buried in the world waiting to be found. Many scientists and archaeologists argue against the existence of “Z” on the basis of the environmental determinism theory. This theory posits that a society can only exist and thrive according to its immediate surroundings. Since the Amazon is a largely inhospitable jungle and river rife with predators and little nutrients, it stands to reason that no sophisticated society could have ever thrived with many inhabitants. As Fawcett and the author prove, however, there are many secrets still left to be discovered in the jungle. For example, scientists once believed it was impossible for the native tribes to develop enduring works of art-which Fawcett disproved when he discovered shards of pottery where none should have existed. He made it his life's mission to prove a city could also exist where none should. The discovery of Macchu Pichu is a similar vindication of Fawcett's belief. To this day, scientists and historians are challenged to rethink their assumptions.

The conquistadores recorded witnessing incredible sights when they visited The New World, such as large-scale villages, paved roads, and causeways. Historians later accused them of being liars because nothing like that could be found in the jungle. However, the author challenges the assumption of believing everything we see. The book argues how too often people only rely on what is visible and assume that is the whole story. Michael Heckenberger showed the author how to see the signs of a once-great city amongst subtle organic ruins in the jungle. Heckenberger knew what to look for; and once he showed the author, the signs became very obvious. Disease, the reliance on organic materials, and European purges were among the main reasons the

larger societies in the Amazon disappeared. That does not mean they were never there. The book ends on a cautionary note: there is an unseen world waiting to be found if only only knows how to look for it. What is immediately visible is not always the whole tale.

Styles

Structure

The book is divided by Fawcett's life history and the author's personal account of his travels into the Amazon. Fawcett's story provides the bulk of the work. It is told in past tense, almost novel-like, where the author's accounts are present tense. Various other interesting narratives are interspersed throughout, such as James Lynch's story and other Fawcett seekers' adventures. The first chapters open in media res, meaning in the middle of things, finding the author in a place of peril in the Amazon. The first Fawcett chapter also capture his last days in the city before departing for his final journey where he would infamously vanish. The point of opening these stories in the middle of the narrative creates thriller-like suspense and keeps the reader turning the pages. Delaying the answers to these dramatic questions compels the reader to find out.

After the opening chapter, the rest of the work is told chronologically. The author begins Fawcett's tale from his childhood in Victorian Britain. In examining Fawcett's upbringing, his motivations and personal struggles-- chaffing in a repressed society-- inform why he later became a professional explorer. Similarly, the author explains how he came across Fawcett's story and became obsessed with it. Rather than continuing the action, the writer gives the reader a sense of who the main players are. This enhances the later drama; it is interesting to see the author adventure into the Amazon after he depicts himself as a cushioned homebody who has never gone camping.

By delaying the resolutions to many separate stories until the end, the author connects every narrative thematically. It works to show that most tales of obsession have similar ends. Every narrative is introduced much the same way: a valiant and obsessed explorer takes to the wild with the certainty of victory, only to come back having failed - if they have not died. The structure then cements the final cautionary tale of the work.

Perspective

As noted, there are two main perspectives in the work: Fawcett's and the author's. The author plays the role of omniscient narrator, adding his commentary while describing Fawcett's past. The author works to parse and make sense of Fawcett's entire life. He objectively builds connections and creates meanings. As a journalist, the author is interested in the perspectives of others, as it helps fill in the missing pieces of a story. He interviews many witnesses and relations to his subject in the hopes of coming closer to a full picture. Unlike other non-fiction works, there is no known conclusion to the tale. Very much like the Royal Geographical Society members who once guessed at what wonders lied within uncharted realms, the author must explore and chart out the mysteries of Colonel Fawcett's life.

The problem of perspective is a major one in The Lost City of Z because it is a book inherently about the lack of perspective. The author wants to solve the mystery of what happened to Fawcett on his last expedition -- but it is a mission doomed to fail because of the lack of perspective. Piecing together Fawcett's journals and last correspondences becomes a quest to uncover the explorer's perspective. The author still succeeds where others have not, providing the fullest picture of Fawcett's final days in society, but it remains frustratingly elusive. The lack of perspective is linked to one of the book's main themes, the lack of closure. There is no answer whether “Z” is real or whether Fawcett survived. Real life is plagued by ambiguity.

As the author is a figure in the book, it is worth investigating the author's own history because every event is colored by the author's point of view. As a journalist and biographer, the author has a formal training in maintaining an objective viewpoint. There is never any conjecture or judgment about Fawcett; the author only presents facts and lets the reader make their own opinion. He presents rumors without labeling them as truth. By the end of the work, the author has etched a complete image of a larger-than-life explorer without judgment but also never without fascination.

Tone

The tone of the work is journalistic and academic, while also reading somewhat like a novel. The author uses a novel-like tone during Fawcett's chapter with a past tense and third person. It creates the effect of reading a suspense story, as if Fawcett and his explorers were fictional characters and not real life figures. The author breaks this tone when necessary, interjecting with the first person and interesting facts that add richness and meaning to the events described. Rather than being dryly academic, many chapters end on cliff-hangers. The author is telling a story as much as he is presenting the facts of a man's life. It is a testament to his strong storytelling abilities-- primarily the use of tone-- that the book has garnished such praise.

While the tone is strong for the most part, it is still uneven. The opening chapter presents a first-person mystery sequence where the author is lost in the Amazon and thinks he is about to be attacked by native tribes. It is a dynamic opening with a promise of later pay-off that never quite delivers. Though interesting, it is tonally jarring because the next 100 pages offer nothing like that opening. The resolution is later given at the end of the book as an afterthought, making the opening seem like a cheap hook in a grounded, objective work. The James Lynch chapter suffers from the same problem; there is much heightened suspense and a strong cliffhanger early on, but the resolution is forgotten until an offhand reference towards the end of the book.

Despite these tonally jarring sections, the book is largely consistent. The Fawcett sections, which are the main body, are written with the author's considerable talent on full display. He picks the most interesting elements to include, which are often fascinating and make for vivid background detail in picturing Fawcett's world. By combining novel-like conventions with a grounded journalistic approach, the author succeeds in his portrait of this complex figure. Adding himself to the mix with his first-

person account of following his subject's trail is especially different. The author becomes a stand-in for the reader, entering this world for the time time in awe.

Quotes

According to this theory [environmental determinism], even if some early humans eked out an existence in the harshest conditions on the planet, they rarely advanced beyond a few primitive tribes. Society, in other words, is a captive of geography.
-- Author (Preface paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote captures a solid definition of environmental determinism, the main scientific theory that is challenged by Fawcett and the author.

Explorers are not, perhaps, the most promising people with whom to build a society. Indeed, some might say that explorers become explorers precisely because they have a streak of unsociability and a need to remove themselves at regular intervals as far as possible from their fellow men.
-- Unnamed Royal Geographical Society Member (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote by an unnamed RGS Member could be a perfect description of Colonel Fawcett himself. It provides thoughtful examination of adventurous explorer types, warts and all.

(...) these accounts made me aware of how much of the discovery of the world was based on failure rather than success-- on tactical errors and pipe dreams.
-- Author (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is illuminating because it shows how the civilized world is paved on the backs of the dead. It gets the reader thinking about the untold millions who died charting the world.

Did the hound find its greatest pleasure in the chase or in the killing of its quarry?
-- Fawcett (chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is a good opening into Fawcett's thought process. His obsession may be about the chase itself rather than the finish line.

I thought of one Fawcett seeker from the 1930s who had classified people based on their reactions to his plans: There were the Prudent (…) the Wise (…) the Very Wise (…) the Romantic (…) the Envious (…) the Practical.
-- Author, quoting an unnamed Fawcett seeker (chapter 7 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote by an unnamed Fawcett seeker applies to the author's experience. It shows how exploration touches a nerve with most people and how the call of the wild may be a universal trait.

the very things that made Fawcett a greater explorer-- demonic fury, single-mindedness, and an almost divine sense of immortality-- also made him terrifying to be with. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of his object -- or destiny.

-- Author (chapter 12 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote captures the complexity of Fawcett; his strengths are also his weaknesses. He was a singular figure whose gifts were also terrible traits that drove him to succeed.

Destiny intended me to go, so there could be no other answer!
-- Fawcett (chapter 8 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote shows how much Fawcett believed it was his destiny to find Z, for better or worse. Many explorers have an unwavering sense of purpose.

While most of my articles seem unrelated, they typically have one common thread: obsession. They are about ordinary people driven to do extraordinary things -- things that most of us would never dare -- who get some germ of an idea in their head that metastasizes until it consumes them.
-- Author (chapter 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: The author explains that obsession is a major unifying theme of his work. Once explained, it is easy to see how most figures in the book are obsessed about something.

He [Fawcett] escaped virtually every pathology in the jungle, but he could not rid himself of the pernicious disease of race.
-- Author (chapter 14 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote shows how the turn-of-the-century European man struggled to reconcile his sense of superiority with the discovery of intelligent savage tribes, long thought inferior.

(...) Fawcett was consumed with visions of Z, which amid the war's horror, gathered only more luster-- a glittering place seemingly immune to the rottenness of Western civilization.
-- Author (chapter 17 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote shows how Fawcett put Z on a pedestal. It also shows how the modern world can be much more savage than the jungle.

Rather than confronting their own reservoirs of courage, Jack and Raleigh seemed to prefer to dwell on what they would do after they returned from the expedition. They were sure that the journey would make them rich and famous.
-- Author (chapter 20 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote provides a window into the boys' naive certainty they will succeed. It is a precursor to the shock and disillusion they will feel early on when things do no go their way.

Anthropologists,' Heckenberger said, "made the mistake of coming into the Amazon in the twentieth century and seeing only small tribes and saying, 'Well, that's all there is.' The problem is that, by then, many Indian populations had already been wiped out by what was essentially a holocaust from European contact. That's why the first Europeans in the Amazon described such massive settlements that, later, no one could ever find.
-- Author, quoting Michael Heckenberger (chapter 25 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote encapsulates one of the book's main themes: the importance to challenge assumptions about the world. Fawcett may never have found Z, but he was not wrong in believing sophisticated Amazonian civilizations once existed.

Topics for Discussion

Is obsession a natural trait in all people? What are you personally obsessed about? Do you have anything in your life that compares to Fawcett's need to find the Lost City of Z?

This question helps the readers think about one of the book's main themes. The book claims to be a tale about obsession; and in making this theme universal and relatable, the reader has a stronger takeaway than the individual experiences of one man. The question offers much to debate.

Does the author's choice to include himself in the book enrich or distract from the tale?

This questions challenges the basic structure of the book. An argument can be made that the author's personal tale is unnecessary to understanding the full picture of Colonel Fawcett; another argument can be made that it creates a sense of closure and validation.

What long-held assumptions about the world do you think need to be challenged, like the ancient civilizations of the Amazon?

Challenging assumptions about the world is one of the book's main themes. This questions makes readers wonder about their own personal unchallenged assumptions and whether those views can be broadened.

Was Nina deluded or right to keep believing her husband and son were alive decades after their disappearance?

Nina's near-religious belief in her family's survival can easily be seen as the mark of a deluded mind. Another argument can be made that she possessed extraordinary strength and faith. This questions helps readers realize how Nina's personality mirrors her husband's.

In what way does this book highlight questions of race?

The book makes many interesting revelations about race, specifically about how interactions with Amazonian natives helped to undermined early twentieth century racism. This question gets the reader thinking about the specific ways that is accomplished.

Are the explorers who venture into certain peril bold or naive?

The modern world is built on the backs of explorers who were driven to succeed despite certain death. Are they foolish or brave? Something in between? This question makes readers think about the call of the wild and the nature of adventurous people.

Do you subscribe to the idea of environmental determinism? Do natural surroundings dictate the fates of societies?

Environmental Determinism is the scientific theory that the book both validates and challenges. The ancient Amazonian civilization was destroyed by the environment and yet flourished in spite of it for years. Is the theory correct or wrong?

Do you believe the book's argument that lack of closure and answers is a fundamental part of life?

This questions gets the reader thinking about how unanswered questions are part of life. The book never answers the main mysteries and it is frustrating but natural. Another argument is that the answers to these questions are obvious.

What do you make of the various figures in the book who have an unwavering sense of destiny?

Many figures throughout the book have complete belief in their own success. This questions gets readers thinking about whether they might share similar certainties about their own future. They can debate if this is right or wrong, good or bad.

What is the purpose of including a large section on World War One in a book about Amazonian exploration? How does it relate to the book's main themes?

This section provides a perfect thematic parallel by showing how the civilized world can be just as savage as the wild jungle. It gets readers to question what they believe about their societies and how so-called civilized people can commit atrocities while still holding onto notions of superiority.