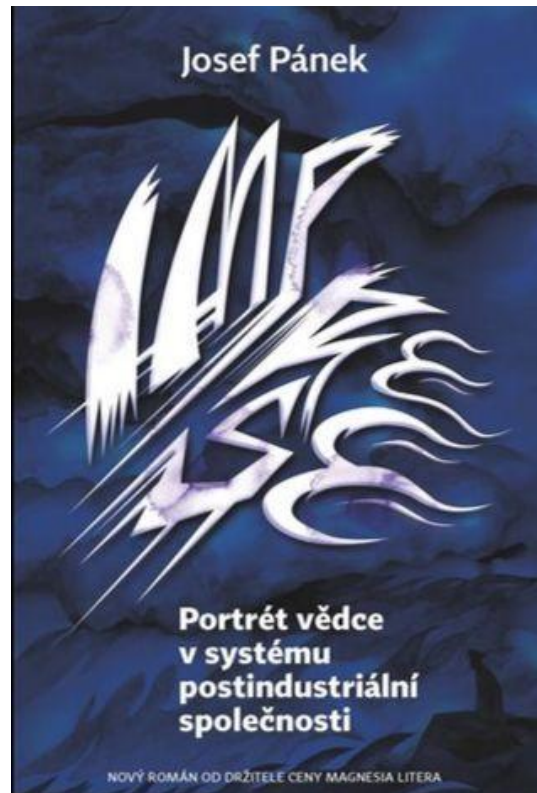




Argo highlights



**A gripping, provocative, and darkly ironic
manifesto for anyone disillusioned with the
contemporary world of science**

**“Would Einstein even get the chance to discover the
theory of relativity today?”**

– Kverulanti

Portrait of a Scientist in the Post- Industrial Society

by **Josef Pánek**

April 2025, 192 pages

Available material: English summary, English sample
translation

Why This Book Stands Out

- A clever fury against a culture obsessed with image, virality and institutional recognition; is directed not only at the system, but at the broader spiritual emptiness of Western society; a place where success is defined by visibility, where ambition replaces wisdom.
- A singular, uncompromising voice that challenges the norms of scientific and literary discourse alike.
- A sharp social critique and generational statement on the collapse of intellectual values.
- An experimental, expressive style rarely seen in Central European fiction.

When a brilliant astrophysicist's groundbreaking discovery is rejected by the very system that should be celebrating it, he walks out of a prestigious conference and takes refuge by a decaying Dublin canal – drunk, furious, and determined to expose the rot at the heart of modern science. What follows is a raw and intellectually piercing account of knowledge in a society obsessed with money, status, and polished appearances.

With razor-sharp wit and existential urgency, Josef Pánek shows how research is driven by money and media attention, while true insight often gets lost along the way. He blends personal experience with cultural critique and philosophical reflection, asking: What happens when truth no longer matters?

Portrait of a Scientist in the Post-Industrial Society is an uncompromising and deeply human statement – and a call to believe, once again, that both science and the world can still hold meaning.

“A brilliant, flowing, angry rant about the state of today's science, art, and the world in general.”

– Host podcast

Josef Pánek (b. 1966) received his masters and PhD in Prague, then worked in Norway and Australia before returning to the Czechia. He debuted with a collection of short stories, entitled *The Opal Digger* (2013). His second book, ***Love in the Time of Global Climate Change*** (Argo, 2017) won the **Magnesia Litera, Czechia's highest literary honour in 2018**. So far, its rights have been **sold to 12 countries**. Argo has also published his novel *To Them, I Am God*, a swirling stream of obsessive thoughts and existential disillusionment, all unfolding in Bergen: a city where it's always gloomy and dark. His latest novel, *Portrait of a Scientist in the Post-Industrial Society* has attracted media attention from both critics and readers alike.

English summary of the book

Josef Pánek's latest book is an essayistic novel that blends fiction with philosophical reflection.

Portrait of a Scientist in the Post-Industrial Society is an emotionally charged, self-ironic, and philosophically inclined monologue of a scientist confronting disillusionment after his groundbreaking discovery is rejected by a prestigious scientific journal. The narrator, an astrophysicist, flees from an international

conference in Dublin and spirals into an existential crisis by the side of a foul-smelling, abandoned canal – an evocative setting that mirrors his inner state and broader societal decay.

Pánek explores the stark dissonance between the ideal of scientific discovery and the current reality of the scientific system. Science, he argues, is no longer a pursuit of truth but has become commercialized, bureaucratized, and shaped by funding, PR strategies, and careerism. Genuine scientists – often introverted, unconventional, socially awkward, and uninterested in fame – are marginalized in this system. In contrast, those who master networking, self-promotion, and institutional politics thrive, often by taking credit for others' work. With bitterness, the narrator observes that popularity now trumps truth, and science has been reduced to another form of mass entertainment.

The novella is also deeply personal. Pánek interweaves reflections on childhood, school experiences, and early moments of rebellion with broader meditations on the difference between basic and applied science. He defends basic research against public misconceptions and moral criticisms, arguing that discoveries – such as radioactivity or the properties of matter – are inherently neutral and beautiful. It is not the scientist's responsibility if others weaponize them into destructive inventions like bombs. The ownership of scientific knowledge, he insists, belongs to humanity, not to individuals.

As the novella unfolds, Pánek expands his focus into a wider civilizational critique. He claims that we live in an era of comfort teetering on the brink of collapse. Science, once a beacon of enlightenment, has been corrupted by ambition and turned into a commodity. In this way, it mirrors the broader trends of the post-industrial world: the decline of meaning, the rise of narcissism, and the exhaustion of resources.

Civilization, he warns, may soon face the same fate as ancient empires – undone not by ignorance, but by the distortion and commercialization of knowledge itself.

In the end, the narrator refuses to return to the conference. The real essence of

science – humility, curiosity, and a deep connection with the world – is no longer found there. Instead, he stays by the canal, which, for all its filth, becomes a place of clarity and a final protest against the commodification of truth.

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