



The Alchemist

By: Paulo Coelho

Reviewed by: Carlos German (20190007639)

The Alchemist by **Paulo Coelho** is a tale about an Andalusian shepherd named Santiago, who, after a series of recurring dreams regarding a great treasure buried at the base of the Great Pyramids, begins a journey to seek and uncover it.

"It's not the destination, it's the journey."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Represented by this famous quote, the destination of where the treasure seemingly lies bears little meaning, with the journey - morals and the struggles that the protagonist has gone through - defining the book's actual purpose. **Joseph Campbell's** *The Hero's Journey*, a template used by most stories is personified through this tale, where the hero, Santiago, leaves a place of comfort, has a revelation, and comes back, changed. Here, this personification as a literal cycle can also be seen, as Santiago ironically finds the treasure at the place where he first started the journey.

It's a story that is heavily embedded in the notions of perseverance, determination, and belief. Throughout, there are a variety of opportunities where Santiago is given the chance to turn around and continue to have a humble livelihood as a shepherd, but for each opportunity, Santiago always chooses not to and continues to make the countless sacrifices required to continue his journey to Egypt. At the very beginning, Santiago is forced to sell his belongings and his valuable sheep. In Africa, after working hard for a complete year and making his valuables back, Santiago forces himself once more to sell these belongings, and continue onwards. At a certain point in the book, Santiago finds himself meeting a woman he falls madly in love with, but once more, he also chooses to leave her behind in pursuit of his literal dreams. Here, the book's main morals can appear slightly misguided. It suggests that one should continue to persevere and listen to their hearts despite the sacrifices and the foolhardy decisions one has to make, and it is in these situations that the protagonist's (and likewise the author's), optimistic viewpoint can be logically seen as gullible or foolish.

The words "Soul of the World" or "Personal Legend" highlights the parable's heavy reliance on the philosophical belief of **Pre Determinism** in that one's destiny or path is already written, and in that one only needs to listen to their hearts and change first to achieve success.

Coelho is attempting to craft a tale that will inspire and give comfort to those who lack confidence in themselves and to showcase that failure is but a footstep to achieving one's ambitions. And here, I agree, in that it is okay to fail. But in stating this, this parable also indirectly labels those who choose not to make these sacrifices as idiotic or lazy and those who choose to live their humble livelihood and ignore life's "omens" as people who missed out on fulfilling life's purpose, which marks them as cowards.

Like the all-too-familiar story of a woman losing her shoe in a ball and finding her true love, or a kiss setting a woman free from a seemingly inescapable curse, *The Alchemist* should be treated in a likewise fashion - as A memorable and entertaining tale whose lessons, while benign, should not be outright taken seriously. While I do applaud Coelho's optimism, it is in my opinion that one should not follow in what his morals suggest, unless one wishes to lose it all in a lottery, that in spite of the universe conspiring "... in helping you to achieve it", and in spite of you continuing to want it, your odds of winning will continue to be the same: About a 1 in 13,983,816.

If told by an individual that Life has already crafted a destiny for you and only asks for one to sell all of their belongings to make it happen, one should ask this person to cross a road blindfolded. If one has this much trust in this invisible entity, then one should likewise cross the road, unless one wishes to be labeled as a cowardly individual who has a lack of belief in the universe's plan.