

Paulo Coelho: social alchemist

The Brazilian author whose book "The Alchemist" has been read by half a billion people, is used to overcoming challenges: Now he wants to inspire a cultural revolution among millions of Twitter devotees.



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Speaking from Geneva, Paulo Coelho's voice resonates with mystical wisdom, though the divine reverberations could be attributed to the echo in his "minimalist" office, furnished only with, "my computer, my bow, my arrows..."

Bow and arrows? "My way of meditating is archery," he explains. "I cannot sit down. I need action!" And in case of intruders? "Also."

Any intruders would only be clamoring for a hug from the Brazilian author of "The Alchemist," the life-affirming fable of a shepherd from Andalusia chasing his dreams across the Sahara. The book has been read by more than half a billion people worldwide, and it turned Coelho into a beacon of spiritual enlightenment, inspiring more than the devotional following of over two million followers on Twitter and 6.6 million fans on Facebook.

No living author, bar Dan Brown, has sold more copies of a single title, and notable

fans include Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin, who demanded a private audience with Coelho in 2006 while the author was traveling across Russia on the Tran-Siberian Railway. "We spent two hours talking," Coelho says. "Of course, I'm not going to tell you what we talked about!"

Coelho's Russian odyssey forms the backbone of his latest book "Aleph," which like The Alchemist recounts a physical journey leading to inner illumination. It's his most personal work to date, opening with Coelho undergoing a crisis of faith,

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