

The Winner Stands Alone by Paulo Coelho – A Dark Piece Of Work That Inspires, Not Entertains



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I have read almost all of [Paulo Coelho](#)'s English translated novels (except "Like the Flowing River"). "Winner", to me, is by far his darkest piece of work. Still inspirational, like all his previous works. But it delivers blow after blow to the readers and make us think: *What have we been doing to our lives?*

The story centers around a Russian millionaire who believes in killing is acceptable if for a good cause, his ex-wife, and her current husband who is a fashion magnate. Upfront, at the preface, Paulo Coelho has already warned the readers that "this is not a thriller, but a stark portrait of where we are now." To read "Winner" as a thriller is certainly not the right way. This novel – more so than others – has a concocted tone of sharing facts and insights mixed with his personal opinions (which can at times be eye-opening), long dialogues from

one character or multiple characters that sound like coming from the same person (which is least of my favorite although they can be inspirational), parables and inspirational quotes (which I love), and story development. I admit that at times, the tone is not as cohesive as I wish to be. However, if indeed not reading "Winner" as a thriller, there are tons of inspirational messages and truth to chew onto.

Paulo Coelho, in his new book, shares details of the fashion and filming industries and the associated celebrity businesses. Some are rather repulsive to read, especially when he illustrates how much we are into vanity these days. Such as "A diamond is the supreme manifestation of human vanity" accompanied with pages of write-up on the diamond industry – from the violence it causes to a piece of jewelery we wear. Most observations are not new to us. Just that we don't often articulate them that way. Like film scripts to him are mostly man loves woman, man loses woman, and man gets woman back. If the script is anything but, make sure there is enough violence or special effect to make up for it. And his list of 46 random items on what 'being normal' means also got me thinking on how we accept the our environment or behavior as normal, in which if you think deeper, you may question why. Such as criticizing anyone who tries to be different, swearing in heavy traffic, or studying at an university for years only finds that you're unemployable at the end of it, and more.

These are just warm up items. There are harder messages he delivers. In the old days, we make pilgrimages to be close to something spiritual that is unattainable and mysterious that can bring blessings. These days, people visit pop concerts more than religious meetings and we worship celebrities in different ways. He also talks about the celebrity syndrome some may have – abandoning what we believe in for fame, ego, and money. We are suffocated by lies, encouraged to put our faith in science instead of spiritual values, and we feed our souls with what society tells us are important. As a result, we are unable to give up all these for true happiness – that is family, nature, and love.

You really could feel a bit depressed by self-reflecting on what he says. Fortunately, there are interesting observations he shares as well as what we could do better. For example, the author

mentioned that there are four forces that guide us to purify our souls: love, death, power, and time. In short, we must love because we are loved by God while conscious of death, struggle to grow but not trapped by the power gained. And our soul is bounded by the web of time with all opportunities as well as limitations. On our current environmental crisis, he highlights that we are not saving the planet, but rather, saving ourselves from not being destroyed by the planet. Because the planet is stronger than us. He also raises my doubt on our “fittest survives” mentality in our day-to-day life when we, human beings, need care and protection especially from young as compared to other species (and hence, I gather, we shall continue to do so in our daily life).

The author also touches onto the topic of workaholic that I enjoy reading as I am a firm believer of the need of work life balance. First he says all workaholics think they are happy doing what they are doing. And it is not something society wants to fix because it helps human progression in the expense of the obvious. Total power – as you advance in career – means total slavery. You find it harder to let go as you gain power and you can’t even do the simple things in life. To combat it, use work as a source of happiness but not compulsion. I guess what he says (and what I practice) is by all means, be happy with work but know when to let go and enjoy the simple things in life. Seek for true happiness in family, nature, and love – something work does not provide you with.

There is one parable that I very much enjoy reading, got me into thinking. This is what I have internalized: One day a sea gull saw a mouse on the ground. Not able to communicate as they spoke in different languages, the sea gull took pity on the creature that has lost its wings. So the sea gull took the mouse onto its back, took flight to the sky thinking that the mouse must have been missing what it was like flying in the air. The mouse had a time of its life and when it was brought back to the ground, as it saw the sea gull took off and disappeared, the mouse began to feel sad, not to be able to experienced that form of freedom again. As days went by, the mouse looked into this miracle thinking that it was just a dream instead.

I think, we often fail to acknowledge the little miracles in life. I can relate to that parable.

To round up this book summary without giving out the plot, there is one constant theme that appears as I read the book. It is the voice of the Devil. In our daily lives, we have encountered many decision points. And at each juncture, there is a little voice in our head to help us decide. Is that the voice of the Angel? Or indeed the voice of the Devil that conditions us in believing that all that we do is for the better even if it comes with a price, knowing something is wrong but yet we create justifications, and failing to see through the obvious or normalcy when everyone is doing it.

You won’t like it when you read “The Winner Stands Alone”. But you will certainly benefit from it and may become or wanting to become a better person. That’s what an inspiration book, not a thriller, is for – for “Winner” does not entertain. Be warned.

PS. Finished this book right before [my Barcelona holiday trip](#).