

## The Alchemy of The Beast: The Lionheart Chronicles

**Alyssa Noelle Coelho**

Saved by Story

(360pp)

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*The allegorical novel The Alchemy of The Beast follows as a once-busy woman redefines her sense of what's ordinary.*

An unexpected trip to Central America is healing for a young entrepreneur in Alyssa Noelle Coelho's allegorical novel *The Alchemy of the Beast*.

After her father dies, a stranger invites Scar to Costa Rica, the setting of the book they're both reading. Scar hopes that the impromptu trip will be a reset—she needs to return to her normal school, work, and a social schedule. But facing the traumas of her recent past leads to a new normal instead, as Scar makes new friends and acknowledges her power.

A small business owner, student, and caregiver for her father, Scar is a goal-oriented heroine who is used to being in control. Her discomfort during the plane ride to Costa Rica and skepticism toward the driver on the way set up the true challenge she faces: she must overcome such tendencies. She achieves her transformation first by giving into sensory temptations, experiencing the tastes, smells, and feelings of her new location, including its flora and fauna. She develops heightened awareness of the world around her thanks in part to this lush, immersive setting.

Promoting the values of setting down one's concerns and relaxing with simple pleasures, the book revels in removing Scar from the realm of her routines. Much of the book is dedicated to her reacting to activities (exploring waterfalls and a ropes course) in jolting ways: she passes out; she has visions; she falls asleep and has revelatory dreams. She also benefits from the wisdom of dance, meditation, and astrology experts; they have conversations with her both in professional settings and over meals. Most are developed as compassionate teachers, exemplifying the ideals Scar is encouraged toward. However, one person's references to star charts and zodiac signs is too vague to be instructive.

The prose verges into magical realism territory with its incorporation of out-of-body experiences, capitalizing on wonder and passion to make its spiritual points. Scar's friendship with her roommate, romance with one of the hosts, and attraction to another person are fraught, giving her space to feel a range of emotions that support her overall change of mind. Further, complementary excerpts from her poetry and artwork are embedded in the text to illustrate her inner work in real time. She becomes exclamatory as the book progresses; for the new Scar, the current moment matters most. This, the book seems to suggest, is a mentality that anyone might adopt.

A recovery story set in Costa Rica, the allegorical novel *The Alchemy of The Beast* follows as a once-busy woman redefines her sense of what's ordinary.

MARI CARLSON (January 3, 2024)

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