

THE ALCHEMIST  
Screenplay Adaptation  
Act 1 Sample

by  
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Adapted from the book

by  
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FADE IN:

EXT. SAHARA DESERT - DAY

A distant desert horizon.

An ORANGE HAZE dampens the sun.

A CHILD, (8 yrs/female), scurries over the sands.

She stops and looks behind.

CHILD  
Come, we're almost there.

SANTIAGO, (17 yrs), follows her. He's lithesome with Mediterranean beauty.

A RUMBLE.

The ground quakes where the Child stands, but she's not frightened.

Behind her, the sands part into a cavernous canyon.

From the trembling earth, the ancient PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT arise and stand in all their majestic glory.

A mystical wind blows.

CHILD (CONT'D)  
If you come here, you will find a hidden treasure.

SANTIAGO  
Where?

The Child takes Santiago's hand.

CHILD  
Close your eyes. And no peeking.

She leads him further across the sand and stops at no distinguishable spot.

CHILD (CONT'D)  
Now open them.

Santiago's eyes flicker behind closed eyelids.

When they suddenly spring open, he stares up at an enormous SYCAMORE TREE.

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - MORNING

Santiago stirs at the foot of a SYCAMORE that has grown through the RUINED ROOF of an abandoned church.

He sits up and stows THE BOOK he used for a pillow inside his SHEPHERD'S POUCH.

Taking up his WALKING STAFF, he ambles through the crusted remains of the sanctuary.

When he opens the front door, he's greeted by A FLOCK OF BLEATING SHEEP.

He pets a LITTLE LAMB.

SANTIAGO  
Good morning, Lila.

EXT. ABANDONED CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Santiago submerges himself amongst his sheep and greets them all by name.

EXT. ANDALUSIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Santiago leads his flock over tumbling acres of green fields.

A RAVEN glides above them.

EXT. A VILLAGE STREET - SPAIN - DAY

The Raven swoops toward the ground and MORPHS into the back of the head of a YOUNG ANDALUSIAN GIRL, (14 yrs).

WE FOLLOW HER through the streets of a busy village.

EXT. DRY GOODS SHOP - DAY

Santiago sits on the stairs of a shop reading his book.

ANDALUSIAN GIRL (O.C.)  
I didn't know shepherds knew how to read.

Santiago looks up to behold the alluring figure of the Young Andalusian Girl.

Her face is partially obscured by sweeping long black hair.

SANTIAGO  
Usually I learn more from my sheep  
than from my books.

She sits beside him.

ANDALUSIAN GIRL  
But where did you learn to read?

SANTIAGO  
Where every one does. In a school.

EXT. SANTIAGO'S VILLAGE - DAY

A slightly younger Santiago, (15 yrs), strolls through his home village dressed in an old, FADED SCHOOL UNIFORM carrying SEVERAL TEXT BOOKS.

INT. SMALL, MODEST HOUSE - DAY

A COUPLE, (Late 40's), attends to chores with weary faces in worn-out clothes.

Santiago stands silhouetted in the front door frame.

SANTIAGO  
Papa, mamma, I want to travel.

His MOTHER has been counting and rationing RAW BEANS. The steady CLICK of beans landing in A BOWL stops.

His FATHER suspends his broom.

FATHER  
Santiago, our kind cannot afford travel. The only exceptions are the shepherds.

SANTIAGO  
Then I will become a shepherd.

Silence ensues as they stare and consider. Then the SOUND of beans landing resumes.

EXT. A STABLE IN TARIFA - DAY

The stables are near the Gates of the city.

Santiago greets the STABLE OWNER, (30's), like an old friend and leaves the sheep in his care.

A GRAND CASTLE stands high on a distant hill.

EXT. TARIFA TOWN PLAZA - DAY

Santiago emerges from a book shop carrying A NEW BOOK.

He meanders through the plaza.

Suddenly he stops and stares ahead - his mind searching.

He looks back over his shoulder at an odd, misplaced establishment. A SIGN says:

GYPSY HOUSE - Readings & Interpretations.

INT. GYPSY HOUSE - DAY

The CANDLELIT ROOM is shadowy.

An OLD GYPSY WOMAN, (Late 40's), leads Santiago through hanging colored beads into a back room.

They sit at a table with two chairs.

The SACRED HEART OF JESUS adorns a wall.

The Gypsy Woman grabs Santiago's hands and launches into a strange prayer.

She stops and studies his hands with mocked intensity.

GYPSY WOMAN  
Very interesting.

Santiago's hands tremble. He snatches them from her.

SANTIAGO  
I did not come here to have my  
palms read.

GYPSY WOMAN  
You came to learn about your  
dreams.

Santiago nods.

GYPSY WOMAN (CONT'D)  
Dreams are the language of God.  
When He speaks in that language, I  
can interpret it.

GYPSY WOMAN (CONT'D)

But if he speaks in the language of the soul, only you can understand. But whichever it is, I will charge you.

SANTIAGO

Twice, I dreamed I was following a child through the desert, when suddenly the Egyptian pyramids rose from the earth. Do you know the pyramids?

GYPSY WOMAN

Never heard of them, but if a child showed them to you, then they exist. Go on.

SANTIAGO

She said to me, "if you come here, you will find a hidden treasure". But just before she showed me, I woke up. Both times.

The woman grabs his hands and searches his palms frantically.

Santiago grows nervous.

She closes her eyes and launches another prayer with more intensity. Santiago pulls his hands back.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

You're scaring me.

GYPSY WOMAN

I changed my mind. I won't charge you. But I want one-tenth of the treasure.

SANTIAGO

What treasure?

GYPSY WOMAN

First, swear to me! Swear that you will give me one-tenth of your treasure in exchange for what I am about to tell you.

SANTIAGO

I swear.

GYPSY WOMAN

Swear it again while looking at the Sacred Heart of Jesus!

He looks at the image.

SANTIAGO

You can have one-tenth of the  
treasure.

GYPSY WOMAN

OK. It is a dream in the language  
of the world. The interpretation is  
very difficult. Only I can  
interpret it. Pay attention! Here  
it comes.

She closes her eyes and goes into a semi-meditative state.

GYPSY WOMAN (CONT'D)

(mysterious-like)

You must go to the Pyramids in  
Egypt. And THERE! You will find a  
hidden treasure.

She expels a ceremonious breath and instantly returns to  
normal.

A pause.

SANTIAGO

That's it?

GYPSY WOMAN

That's it.

SANTIAGO

But I already knew that.

GYPSY WOMAN

Your session is up. Out of my  
house. Come back after you've found  
the treasure.

SANTIAGO

How do I get to Egypt?

She ushers him through the colored beads.

GYPSY WOMAN

I do interpretations. Not travel  
arrangements. Now go. Out! Out!

EXT. GYPSY HOUSE / TOWN PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

Santiago emerges visibly irritated.

A WINE MERCHANT pushing A CART passes him.

Santiago stops him and buys a BOTTLE.

He sits on a bench, pulls the cork out with his teeth, and samples the libation.

After a swig, he takes out his new book and begins to read.

An old man, MELCHIZEDEK, (50's), with a distinguished face, dressed in DILAPIDATED GARMENTS, sits beside him.

MELCHIZEDEK  
What are they doing?

He points to the PEOPLE in the plaza. Santiago is not interested in conversation.

SANTIAGO  
(dryly)  
Working.

MELCHIZEDEK  
It's very hot today.

Santiago nods without taking his eyes away from his book.

MELCHIZEDEK (CONT'D)  
What is that you read? A book?

SANTIAGO  
Yes. A book.

He holds the book out close to Melchizedek's face, almost like a shield. Melchizedek takes it.

MELCHIZEDEK  
Ah, and a very important one at that.

SANTIAGO  
(surprised)  
You read it?

MELCHIZEDEK  
Why of course. But I found it to be irritating.

SANTIAGO  
How so?

MELCHIZEDEK  
Oh, it's just like most of the other books.

MELCHIZEDEK (CONT'D)

In the end, it says that everyone believes the world's greatest lie.

Santiago is intrigued.

SANTIAGO

What is the world's greatest lie?

MELCHIZEDEK

Mind if I have a sip of your wine?

Santiago hands him his bottle. Melchizedek takes a long drawn out drink.

He hands the bottle back and suddenly becomes imbued with a mysterious sense of authority.

MELCHIZEDEK (CONT'D)

It is this: at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what is happening to us. Our lives become controlled by fate. That is the world's greatest lie.

SANTIAGO

That didn't happen to me. My parents wanted me to be a priest, but I decided to become a shepherd.

MELCHIZEDEK

Good for you. Because you like to travel. How many sheep do you have?

SANTIAGO

Enough.

MELCHIZEDEK

Well then, I'm afraid I can't help you if you have enough.

SANTIAGO

I didn't ask for help.

MELCHIZEDEK

Of course you did.

SANTIAGO

What's your name?

MELCHIZEDEK

I am Melchizedek, the king of Salem.

SANTIAGO

Forgive me king Melchizedek. I must be going. May I have my book back?

MELCHIZEDEK

Give me one-tenth of your sheep and I will show you how to find the treasure.

SANTIAGO

You sound like a Gypsy woman I know.

Melchizedek leans over, picks up A STICK, and writes in the sand.

SOMETHING BRIGHT reflects from his chest. It's so intense that Santiago is momentarily blinded.

With a movement too quick for his age, Melchizedek covers it with his CAPE.

When Santiago's vision returns to normal, he reads what Melchizedek wrote.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

Those are the names of my parents. And that's the name of the school I attended. But who is Sylvia Liaño?

MELCHIZEDEK

The girl in the village with the raven hair.

SANTIAGO

I never knew her name. Who are you?

MELCHIZEDEK

I am Melchizedek, the king of Salem.

SANTIAGO

Why does a king talk to a shepherd?

MELCHIZEDEK

Because you're trying to realize your destiny. And you're at the point where you're about to give it all up.

SANTIAGO

Is that when you usually appear?

MELCHIZEDEK

In one way or another. Sometimes  
I'm a solution, or a good idea.

SANTIAGO

I don't understand.

MELCHIZEDEK

When you want something, all the  
universe conspires in helping you  
to achieve it.

SANTIAGO

So you'll help me find the  
treasure?

MELCHIZEDEK

If you want to learn about your  
treasure, you must give me one-  
tenth of your flock.

SANTIAGO

What about one-tenth of the  
treasure?

MELCHIZEDEK

Ah, but if you start out by  
promising what you do not have yet,  
you will lose your desire to work  
towards getting it.

SANTIAGO

(embarrassed)

I already promised one-tenth to a  
gypsy.

MELCHIZEDEK

Yes, I know. She's good at that.  
Tomorrow, bring me one tenth of  
your flock and I will tell you how  
to find the hidden treasure.

Melchizedek returns the book and disappears around the corner  
of the plaza.

Santiago tries to read again but he can't concentrate.

EXT. TARIFA TOWN VILLAGE - DAY

MONTAGE: Santiago wanders through the town and the fields.

INT. SMALL TICKET BUREAU - DAY

TWO ATTENDANTS, (40's/50's), observe Santiago tentatively approach the purchasing window.

ATTENDANT ONE  
Can I help you?

SANTIAGO  
Maybe tomorrow.

Santiago drifts away.

ATTENDANT TWO  
Another dreamer.

EXT. THE CITY CASTLE - DAY

Santiago climbs a STONE RAMP that leads to the top of the wall surrounding the Castle.

From there he can see the entire city of Tarifa and the ocean beyond.

The wind wisps around him as he ponders.

EXT. TARIFA TOWN PLAZA - DAY

Melchizedek is waiting for Santiago by the bench when he arrives with six sheep.

SANTIAGO  
My friend bought all the other sheep. He said he always dreamed of being a shepherd.

MELCHIZEDEK  
The principle of favorability. When you play cards the first time, you are almost sure to win.

SANTIAGO  
Why is that?

MELCHIZEDEK  
There is a force that wants you to realize your destiny. It whets your appetite with a taste of success.

Melchizedek stoops and begins inspecting the sheep.

SANTIAGO  
So where's the treasure?

MELCHIZEDEK  
(casually)  
It's in Egypt, near the Pyramids.

SANTIAGO  
Oh no, that's twice now.

MELCHIZEDEK  
In order to find the treasure, you  
must follow the omens.

A BUTTERFLY APPEARS FROM THIN AIR and flutters between  
Santiago and Melchizedek.

SANTIAGO  
My grandfather once told me that  
butterflies are good omens.

MELCHIZEDEK  
Your grandfather was right.

Melchizedek opens his cape to reveal A BREASTPLATE OF HEAVY  
GOLD COVERED WITH PRECIOUS STONES.

SANTIAGO  
You really are a king.

Melchizedek removes a WHITE STONE and a BLACK STONE from the  
center of his breastplate and holds them out for Santiago.

MELCHIZEDEK  
Take these. They are Urim and  
Thummim. The black signifies "yes".  
The white, "no". When you are  
unable to read the omens, they will  
help you. Always ask an objective  
question. But if you can, try to  
make your own decisions.

SANTIAGO  
Urim and Thummim.

Santiago puts the stones into his pouch.

MELCHIZEDEK  
Remember, to realize one's destiny  
is a person's only real obligation.  
All things were written by the same  
hand.

Melchizedek clasps his hands together and makes several strange gestures over Santiago's head.

Then he takes his sheep and walks away.

EXT. THE HIGHEST POINT IN TARIFA - DAY

In the distance, a SMALL SHIP pulls away from the CITY PORT.

Melchizedek, surrounded by his new flock, watches the ship inch its way out to sea.

He finally turns and saunters off. The sheep follow him.

MELCHIZEDEK

Lila, tell your brothers to keep  
up.

EXT. BUSY STREET IN TANGIER - DAY

The streets bustle with life.

Men walk hand in hand. Others smoke from gigantic hookah pipes. Women pass with covered faces.

Strange music accompanies the exotic cacophony.

Santiago wanders the streets in fascination.

INT. CAFE BAR - DAY

Santiago enters and sits at a table that a WAITER, (Late 40's), is wiping down.

The Waiter speaks to him in Arabic. Santiago points to a drink at another table.

The Waiter claps.

A SERVER brings the drink.

Santiago takes a sip and immediately spits it back into the CUP.

HASSAN, an Arabian Teen, (17 yrs), sitting at the next table, chuckles.

HASSAN

You get used to the taste.

SANTIAGO  
What is this?

HASSAN  
Bitter tea. Very common in this region.

SANTIAGO  
If I spoke your language, I would have ordered wine.

HASSAN  
There is no wine in this country. The religion here forbids it.

SANTIAGO  
I just arrived.

Hassan moves to his table.

HASSAN  
What are you doing here?

SANTIAGO  
I'm going to the Pyramids. I need a guide. I can pay for one.

HASSAN  
Do you have any idea how to get there? You have to cross the entire desert. You have enough money to do that?

SANTIAGO  
I think so.

After a beat.

HASSAN  
I am Hassan. I will be your guide. But first you have to show me that you have enough money.

Santiago takes his money from his pouch and shows it to his new friend.

The Waiter that served Santiago races over to the table.

He exchanges harsh words with Hassan in Arabic.

HASSAN (CONT'D)  
He wants us to leave.

Santiago stands.

The Waiter grabs Santiago and speaks to him in an angry tone.

Hassan pushes the Waiter away and pulls Santiago outside with him.

EXT. CAFE BAR - CONTINUOUS

HASSAN

He wanted your money. Tangier is not like the rest of Africa. This is a port. Every port has its thieves.

SANTIAGO

Thanks for your help.

HASSAN

Come, we can get to the Pyramids by tomorrow.

He takes the money from Santiago.

HASSAN (CONT'D)

But first I must buy two camels for the journey.

EXT. STREETS OF TANGIER - DAY

The two teens walk together through the narrow city streets.

Without being obvious, Santiago keeps an eye on Hassan, and the money he's holding.

EXT. PLAZA MARKETPLACE - DAY

They reach the center of a LARGE PLAZA with CROWDS OF PEOPLE BARTERING, BUYING, AND SELLING a variety of goods.

Santiago stops to admire an EXQUISITELY CRAFTED SWORD hanging in one of the stalls.

It's magnificent with meticulous detail.

Santiago is enthralled by the beautiful craftsmanship.

SANTIAGO

Ask the owner of the stall the price of the sword.

A sudden realization washes over his face.

He's been distracted!

He stares at the sword a little longer before turning to face what he already knows.

Into the masses, Hassan has vanished.

Dazed by betrayal, he wades through the throng.

An ARABIC CHANT booms from the bullhorn of a HOLY MAN in a nearby tower.

Everyone around Santiago falls to their knees, places their forehead on the ground, and joins the Holy Man in prayer.

Santiago is the only one standing.

He looks around him at a sea of men kneeling to a God that just betrayed him.

Sorrow envelops him. Alone in a foreign land with no money.

Santiago weeps.

DISSOLVE TO:

EARLY NEXT MORNING.

The marketplace is quiet. Devoid of stalls.

Santiago sleeps.

He awakes with a jolt and looks around confused.

After a moment he remembers.

As he stands, he hears something rolling around inside his pouch.

He reaches in and pulls out the two stones, Urim and Thummim.

He runs his fingers over them, scrutinizing their surfaces.

He puts them back inside and gives the pouch a shake.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

Always ask an objective question.  
Is the old man's blessing still  
with me?

He reaches in and pulls out the black one.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

Yes! Black means yes.

He puts it back in and shakes again.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)  
Am I going to find my treasure?

This time when he reaches inside, both stones fall through a hole in the pouch and land on the ground.

Surprised, Santiago looks at the tiny hole.

He picks up the stones and puts them in his pocket.

STALL OWNERS, (Various ages/genders), begin to arrive and assemble their stalls.

The plaza rapidly comes to life.

Santiago marches over to a CANDY MERCHANT, (40's), and begins helping him assemble his stall without asking permission.

The Candy Merchant allows it and offers Santiago a piece of candy.

EXT. CRYSTAL SHOP - STREET - DAY

The shop is at the top of a hilly street with just a few SHOPS, and fewer SHOPPERS.

Santiago climbs the hill, casually looking into windows.

INT. CRYSTAL SHOP - DAY

There are no customers present.

A CRYSTAL MERCHANT, (early 50's, fatherly), observes the appearance of a boy in the window who stares at the dusty display.

Santiago enters hesitantly.

SANTIAGO  
I can clean those glasses in the window. The way they look now, no one will buy them.

The Crystal Merchant looks at him without speaking.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)  
In exchange, you could give me something to eat.

Still no response.

Santiago removes A HANDKERCHIEF from his pouch, shakes it out, and begins cleaning one of the glasses.

EXT. CRYSTAL SHOP - DAY

An AUSTRIAN SOLDIER passes the display just as Santiago replaces the newly CLEANED GLASS.

INT. CRYSTAL SHOP - DAY

The Austrian Soldier enters with purpose.

The Crystal Merchant perks up.

AUSTRIAN SOLDIER  
Grüss Ghott.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT  
Good day, sir. How may I be of service to you?

AUSTRIAN SOLDIER  
(heavy accent)  
Vat is tze cost for tze glass in tze vindow?

The Merchant points to a table.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT  
I have them right here. I can make you a very special offer.

AUSTRIAN SOLDIER  
Tze price, bitte?

EXT/INT. CRYSTAL SHOP - DAY

Santiago replaces the final glass into a display full of SHINNY GLASSES.

Another SMILING CUSTOMER exits the shop with A PURCHASE.

The Crystal Merchant hangs A SIGN on the door and holds it open for Santiago.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT  
Let's go have some lunch.

EXT. CRYSTAL SHOP STREET / CAFE - DAY

Santiago and the Crystal Merchant walk in silence and seat themselves at the only OUTDOOR TABLE of a nearby CAFE.

The Crystal Merchant breaks the silence.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT

You didn't have to do any cleaning.  
The Quran requires me to feed a  
hungry person.

SANTIAGO

Then why did you let me do it?

CRYSTAL MERCHANT

The crystal was dirty.

A CAFE WAITER, (20's), arrives at the table. The Crystal Merchant places an order in Arabic.

EXT. CAFE - LATER

Remnants of COUSCOUS remain on the Crystal Merchant's PLATE.

Santiago's PLATE is wiped clean.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT

Two customers came in while you  
were working. That is a good omen.

SANTIAGO

People talk a lot about omens.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT

Do you want to work for me?

SANTIAGO

I can work for the rest of today  
and all night until dawn. I will  
clean every piece of crystal in  
your shop. In return, I need money  
to go to Egypt tomorrow.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT

(laughing)

Even if you cleaned my crystal for  
an entire year and earned a good  
commission selling every piece, you  
would still have to borrow money to  
get to Egypt. There are thousands  
of kilometers between here and  
there.

A profound silence descends over Santiago.

CRYSTAL MERCHANT (CONT'D)

(sympathetic)

I can give you the money to get  
back to your country, my son.

Santiago stands and picks up his pouch.

SANTIAGO

I will work for you.

He stares blankly into the distance.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

I need money to buy sheep.