

The Time Element in Alchemy

"Everything he touches turns to gold."

The Midas idea, or Rumpelstiltskin, or alchemy in general brings to my mind an instant transformation from cheap material to gold. It's a useful analogy, but it lacks something.

On the way to the office this morning, a thought popped into my head. *Everything I touch turns to gold*. It was a weird thought, because it doesn't seem true. I've had tons of failures, and many more long, slow slogs through the shit-trenches to get success.

But it struck me that, if I collapse my life into a single set of before/after descriptions, the Midas idea may appear true. I have made some valuable stuff I'm proud of. If you look at the resources used before I mixed my labor with them, then look at the final outcome, it's like alchemy. If you add one missing element: time.

What if Midas had to touch something, and keep touching it, working it, adjusting it, sweating over it for years before it turned to gold? What if alchemy is as much about time and work as it is magic?

Even the great wizard Gandalf had to labor and sweat to transform the world with magic. Witches need rare, difficult to obtain ingredients and hard to learn spells and rituals to perform their feats.

If viewed outside of time, most human lives and activities resemble alchemy. We are masters at transforming lower order inputs into higher order goods. Adding time doesn't make it less magical.