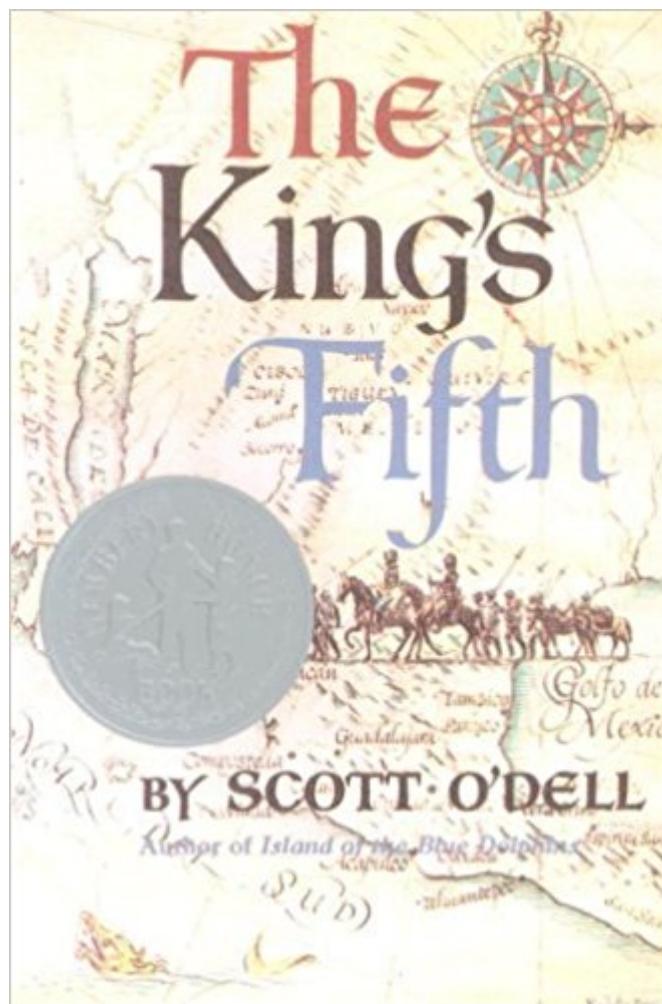


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# The King's Fifth



## Synopsis

In this deeply affecting novel Scott O'Dell envelops the reader in the heroic world of the conquistadors—a world that is at once somber and many-colored. Though they may have been ruthless, these steel-helmeted young men of Spain lived their lives on the very edge of eternity with style and uncommon courage.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

"The writing is subtly beautiful, often moving, and says more than may be caught in one reading."

In this deeply affecting novel Scott O'Dell envelops the reader in the heroic world of the conquistadors, a world that is at once somber and many-colored. Ruthless they may have been, these steel-helmeted young men of Spain, but they lived their lives on the very edge of eternity with style and uncommon courage.

The story of Esteban de Sandoval and his exploits in the New World is superb, and a journey well worth taking. There aren't enough young adult books set in the Age of Exploration, and *The King's Fifth* stands out among this small company because of its compelling characters and moral complexities. Heartily recommended to anyone who enjoys historical fiction, stories about the search

for mythical cities--or anyone who's too young to enjoy The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.

Great condition!! Our daughter loves this book!

Flash backs have lots of action, but the present day events can get a bit sluggish for a 12yo boy. I enjoyed it.

Great!

This is a easy book to read and is very enjoyable. The story is good and captavating. All in all, I could not put this book down.

This book to me was not a WOW book. More of a ok. It's good If you are homeschooled because they are used to the kind of books. Hand it to a public schooled child and he wouldn't get past the first chapter

The setting is in New Spain, the area of North America occupied by Spain during the 1500's. The year is 1541, with a young seventeen year old man being held in a small prison cell in a fortress in Vera Cruz. In the opening chapter, we meet Esteban de Sandoval, a cartographer or map maker, as he is being questioned by the jailor, Don Felipe. We immediately learn that Sandoval is being charged with defrauding the King of Spain from his share of one-fifth on a treasure of gold, that Sandoval has hidden in a remote wilderness. Don Felipe is treating him kindly by bringing paper, quills, an inkwell and candle because he wishes for Sandoval to draw him a map of Cibola, the area in which the gold was found, and a map showing the location of where the gold is hidden. By candlelight, Sandoval begins to work on a map from memory, but most importantly, he begins to write his story of what has brought him to this moment. We learn that Sandoval was on a Spanish ship, when he left with a small crew of adventurers led by Captain Mendoza, a gold hungry opportunist. They join up with Coronado's army where they meet Zia, a young Indian girl who speaks five languages, and Father Francisco, who wishes to preach Christ to the natives. Soon they leave Coronado and with Zia as guide and interpreter, set off in search of Indian tribes said to have gold. The story fluctuates Sandoval's writing of what happened on the quest, and what is happening in the prison and courtroom. There is lots of excitement and danger from the Indians, deception by Mendoza and his soldiers, and a deepening affection between Sandoval, Zia, and Father Francisco.

Sandoval is constantly under scrutiny by everyone, as they seek to find where he has hidden the treasure. The trial will hold you spellbound, and there are many twists to the story, as well as a surprising ending. This book is a classic. I could hardly put it down. The ending will leave you thinking about the outcome. This is an exceptional story that I will be thinking about for a long time to come.

In my continuing quest to read all that is historical fiction based during the Spanish conquest of the Americas, I finally jumped into Scott O'Dell's "The King's Fifth." I recently finished O'Dell's "Seven Serpents" trilogy which follows the young Julian Escobar as he travels from Spain to the New World in a quest to save the savage souls of the New World's natives. While his early journey established his innocence, his travels across the Yucatan, central Mexico and eventually Peru expose his personal fall from grace. O'Dell's hero in "King's Fifth" is different from Escobar, but mostly in name and location. In this short novel, we find Esteban de Sandoval imprisoned in the Spanish fortress of San Juan de Ulua on the far east coast of Mexico. Having found a significant treasure, Esteban is charged with refusing the Spanish King his fifth of the treasure - the standard percentage that all explorers are due their king. The key drama is not Esteban's innocence or guilt of the crime...he fully admits to withholding the King's fifth. The core mystery is determining where the treasure is exactly and why, as Esteban contends, it will never be found. O'Dell's narrative bounces between Esteban's flashbacks of his adventure in the new world, and his trial which spans the course of several weeks. A young mapmaker on board a ship in the Sea of Cortes, Esteban becomes associated with mutineers and finds himself in western Mexico with the explorer Coronado who's in search of the fabled Cibola. His brush with the non-fictional Coronado is quite brief, but is reminiscent of Julian Escobar's travels with both Hernan Cortes and Francisco Pizarro. I didn't find the story as compelling nor deep as "The Serpent Trilogy" although it's well written, and the pacing and tone are extremely similar. The real story is about lost innocence and the driving forces behind Spanish exploration. Esteban simply wants to make maps...to find something new that's never been mapped, and forever associate himself with such a discovery. Paralleling Escobar's fall from grace, the lure of gold becomes too much for Esteban and, he too, succumbs to the disease del oro. While the story ends in redemption (although not complete), the conclusion is rather abrupt and unfulfilling. If you seek an introduction into the world of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, I'd start with "The Serpent Trilogy." "The King's Fifth" is good, but not nearly as well rounded, deep and satisfying.

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