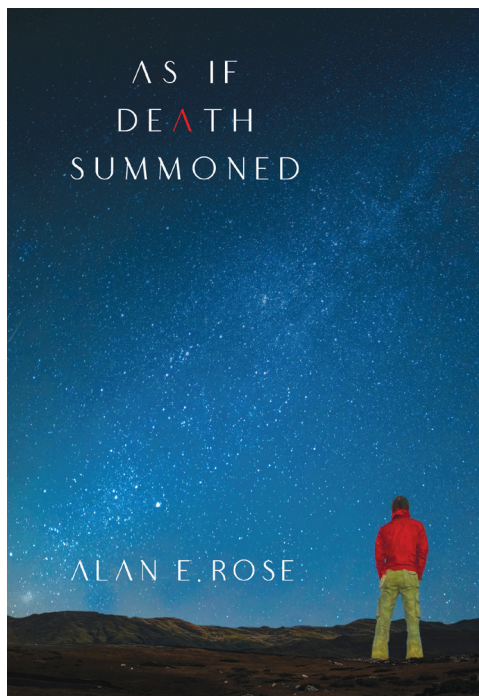


AS IF DEATH SUMMONED

MEDIA KIT • JANUARY 2021

Novel of the AIDS epidemic by local author speaks to our current pandemic



Cascade AIDS Project in Portland, Oregon, from 1993-1999, before coming to Longview, Washington, as director of community services at Lower Columbia Community Action Program. He is the book reviewer for *The Columbia River Reader*, hosts KLTV's *Book Chat* program, and coordinates the monthly WordFest gatherings which have switched to Zoom meetings on the second Tuesday of each month.

He retired from Lower Columbia CAP in 2015 to write full time. "I had attempted to write this story over the years, but each time I became blocked, so I went on to other projects." His first novel, *The Legacy of Emily Hargraves*, a paranormal mystery, was published in 2007, followed in 2010, by *Tales of Tokyo*, a modern quest novel set in Japan. In 2012, Bold Strokes Books published his novella, *The Unforgiven*, a dark psychological mystery that explores the relationship between memory and guilt.

After struggling to write his novel about the AIDS epidemic for so many years, it suddenly flowed. "I think it needed all this time to percolate in my subconscious, and then it just gushed forth," said Rose. He wrote the first draft in two years, and then took another two years to polish the manuscript and begin sending it to agents and publishers. In 2019, Bywater Books picked up the book.

The story takes place over one long night in a hospital waiting room where the narrator is keeping a vigil for a friend in the ICU. As the narrator waits alone ("just me and a few dozen ghosts") he recalls events of the past ten years, recounting the early days of the epidemic.

In early 2020, as the manuscript was being prepared for printing, the world was hit by a new coronavirus. "It brought back a lot of memories," said Rose. "There were many similarities, but also significant differences between the two epidemics." He added a foreword to the novel, "On Writing about the AIDS Epidemic in a Time of Covid-19," which explores the similarities and differences, and the lessons learned from the earlier epidemic.

The novel has received strong positive reviews since its release.

Foreword Reviews called it "as heartwarming and hope-giving as it is heartbreaking." The reviewer in *Out in Print*, wrote, "Initially, I have to confess that I was not expecting to enjoy this novel. Haven't we all read enough AIDS novels already? Do we really need another one? But once I started, I couldn't put it down...I can honestly say that I would not have missed reading his novel."

Rose is pleased and relieved at the book's reception. "I was concerned that people would think, Oh, an AIDS novel. Must be a real downer. But it has a lot of humor and I think it's ultimately life-affirming."

Rose finds lessons from the AIDS epidemic that can benefit our community during this current health crisis. "It was a dark time, a frightening time, a perpetually sad time. But we also saw the good in humanity rise up to its noblest and best. There was so much courage and compassion, so much grace and dignity, so much love and self-sacrifice. And humor, undying humor in the face of death."

FULL MEDIA RELEASE

On World AIDS Day, December 1, 2020, and the eve of the 40th anniversary of the AIDS epidemic, Amble Press, an imprint of Bywater Books, released *As If Death Summoned*, a haunting novel of the epidemic by Alan E. Rose.

In 1981, what was to become known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, appeared on the nation's radar as gay men in San Francisco and New York City began dying of a mysterious illness.

"It was a scary and uncertain time," said Rose. "Friends were suddenly falling ill and in the hospital, and no one knew why." It wouldn't be until 1983 that the CDC determined that a retrovirus called human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) was causing the mounting deaths.

Rose's novel takes place in 1995, 14 years into the epidemic. By that time, more than 300,000 Americans had died of AIDS.

Rose worked as the mental health specialist and later as prevention program manager at

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"I spent much of this novel fighting back tears. In many other instances, I was chuckling at the first-person character's wry, snarky humor... But going even deeper, the novel grapples with moral ambiguities and philosophical mysteries concerning the nature of life and death and reality. In our current era of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), Rose's book is a valuable contribution to this ongoing human conversation."

~ Jeff Stookey, Author of the *Medicine for the Blues* trilogy



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The Powerful Story of One Man's Journey Through the AIDS Epidemic, and Finding the Courage to Bring Oneself Back from the Dead.

FIRST REVIEWS

"Initially, I have to confess that I was not expecting to enjoy this novel. Haven't we all read enough AIDS novels already? Do we really need another one? But once I started, I couldn't put it down. Rose's novel retells the early days of the AIDS pandemic in Australia and the States during the 80s and 90s, a time when being diagnosed with HIV meant one's death was imminent...I can honestly say that I would not have missed reading his novel."

~ Keith John Glaeske, *Out in Print*

... revelatory, cathartic, and inspiring, all in one package ... As If Death Summoned evokes the ultimate paradox...that nothing confirms and sweetens life and living like the direct confrontation with death and dying. That bitter-sweet sentiment permeates this book, and offers us, besides a dramatic chronicle of suffering and loss, hopefulness and humor...

~ Hal Calbom, *Columbia River Reader*

"It was a dark time, a frightening time, a perpetually sad time," [Rose] said. "But we also saw the good in humanity rise up to its noblest and best. There was so much courage and compassion, so much grace and dignity, so much love and self-sacrifice. And humor, undying humor in the face of death."

~ *The Daily News*, Longview, WA, January 14, 2021

"Heart-wrenching and at the same time heart-lifting, Rose ingeniously draws the reader in with his exquisite prose, raw emotion and dark humor. To be able to laugh and cry at the same time is a nod to Rose's astute insight into the human condition where, even when surrounded by darkness, there can still be light...a stark reminder of a time when courage, dignity and hope transcended fear..."

~ Hannah Dennison, Author of the *Honeychurch Hall Mysteries*, and the *the Island Sisters Mysteries*

"A luminous novel...In a deeply moving Author's Note, Rose shares "I find a peculiar symmetry that, just as I am bringing one defining epidemic of my life to a close with this book, another

epidemic begins"... And after listing the similarities of the two epidemics, he points out the very significant differences – "This time it is not happening to Those People, but to all of us" ... This message alone is reason to own this book!...An involving, beautifully offered novel, Alan Rose makes a significant impact with this excellent book. Very highly recommended."

~ Grady Harp, Author of *The Art of Man* series

"... one of the most profound and riveting autobiographical novels I have read in years. I read it straight through in one intense sitting. Alan Rose's writing is alive, seamlessly weaving the emotions of grief, anger, love, acceptance, and joy in an ever-accelerating tale...At a time when we find ourselves paralyzed by yet another pandemic, the parallels Rose draws between the two diseases and the means to address them are uncanny... One can only hope that we as a society will return home from this Bogong-like "blizzard," with both our bodies and our souls intact, better and wiser than we were before. Through the pages of this brilliant story, Rose demonstrates that this can indeed be done. That life is to be lived with intention, artistry, and purpose. That we are not resigned."

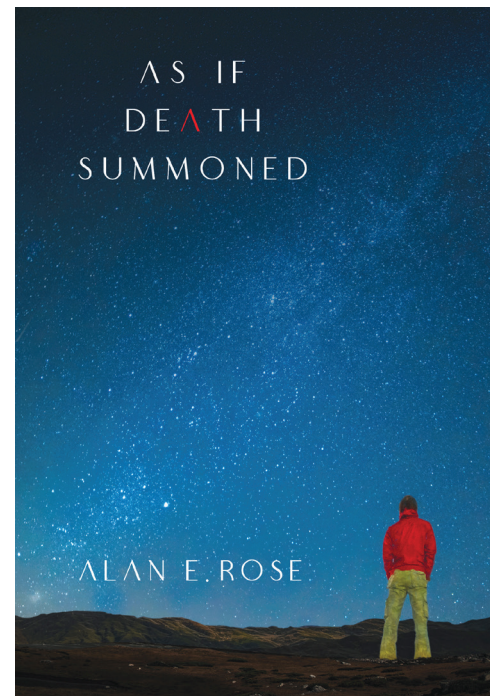
~ Liesl Messerschmidt, MPH
HIV program researcher and director
Health and Development Consulting International

"I spent much of this novel fighting back tears. In many other instances, I was chuckling at the first-person character's wry, snarky humor... But going even deeper, the novel grapples with moral ambiguities and philosophical mysteries concerning the nature of life and death and reality. In our current era of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), Rose's book is a valuable contribution to this ongoing human conversation."

~ Jeff Stookey, Author of the *Medicine for the Blues* trilogy

"Vivid and heartbreaking...one of the best works I have read in a long time. I will reflect on the characters for weeks to come. This tale grips the reader as it tenderly draws them on a journey that champions rebuilding life out of grief, loss, and suffering during an epidemic that swept away a generation...If you read only one novel at this moment, it should be this one."

~ Vikki J. Carter, producer of the podcast, *Authors of the Pacific Northwest*



BOOK EXCERPT

"This epidemic has done wonderful things for our souls. I've had more and deeper experiences in the past thirteen years than most people would have in a lifetime. I've seen the best in a man rise up, surprising even himself. I've witnessed such bravery and courage, such acts of self-sacrifice and compassion that are usually only found on a battlefield. I've seen the soul pass out of a man with his last breath—I swear I did—it was a small puff of vapor and light. It sounds strange, I know, and I don't always feel like this, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world." He looked down at his shaking hand. "When all is considered, the body is a small price to pay, don't you think?"

Review copies available on request from amblepresspublishing@gmail.com

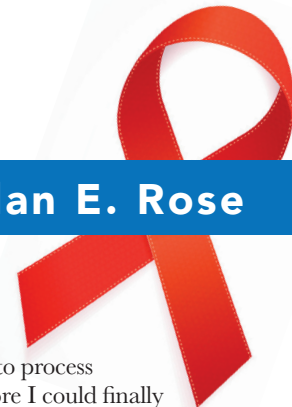
"As heartwarming and hope-giving as it is heartbreaking, As If Death Summoned showcases the best and worst aspects of the fight against HIV."

~ Aimee Jodoin, *Foreword Reviews*

Read full reviews at www.alan-rose.com/as-if-death-summoned/book-reviews

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RESPECTING THE GHOSTS: Interview with Author Alan E. Rose

Vikki J. Carter, producer of the podcast series *Authors of the Pacific Northwest* interviews Alan Rose about his novel of the AIDS epidemic, *As If Death Summoned*, published by Amble Press, an imprint of Bywater Books, and released on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2020.

VJC: *Your novel comes out on the 40th anniversary of the AIDS pandemic and in the midst of a new epidemic. Was that a coincidence?*

AER: Definitely a coincidence. I never planned the Covid-19 epidemic. But I was hoping the novel would be ready by 2021, the 40th anniversary since AIDS—Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—appeared on our national radar.

VJC: *The story is set primarily in Portland, Oregon.*

AER: Yes, the book takes place over one long night in a hospital waiting room in 1995, where the narrator is keeping a lone vigil for a friend in the ICU – “Just me and a few dozen ghosts,” he says, remembering the past 10 years. One of the questions in the book is who, which friend, is now in the ICU.

VJC: *I had the sense that this vigil is for the narrator as well.*

AER: It is. At this point, the narrator is exhausted, burnt out after working on the front lines of the epidemic. He’s lost more than 30 friends and colleagues, including his partner in Australia, and has returned to the United States, where he is working with a community AIDS organization in Portland.

VJC: *I noticed you never name the narrator. Why was that?*

AER: That was intentional. I see the narrator as representative. He’s like the Unknown Soldier in wars, representing all the unknown and lost soldiers. The narrator represents the stories of the epidemic that were never told. And there were many. At the time the book takes place, in 1995, more than 300,000 Americans had already died of AIDS, most of them gay men.

VJC: *Foreword Reviews* called your novel “as heartwarming and hope-giving as it is heartbreaking.”

AER: Yes, I was pleased to see that, because I feared people would think, “Oh, an AIDS novel. Must be a real downer,” whereas, I think it’s very life-affirming.

VJC: *I was expecting the heartbreak. I was surprised at the humor.*

AER: I included a lot of humor, because there was a lot of humor. Wonderful moments of humor amid all the grief and suffering. And I wanted to reflect that incredibly brave humor in the book.

VJC: *Some of the flashbacks take place in Australia, especially on the Bogong High Plains of Victoria. What is their significance?*

AER: At 6000 feet, the Bogong High Plains is a vast plateau in northern Victoria, about 150 miles north of Melbourne. They were sacred to the aboriginal people of Australia. And they become a kind of additional character in the novel, representing the mystical, the mysterious, the holy in human existence.

VJC: *There’s a sub-theme winding through your book, about an actual event in Australia’s history called the Mt. Bogong Tragedy, and you connect the narrator to that event.*

AER: Yes, in 1936, 3 skiers attempted to cross the high plains in winter. They were caught in a blizzard that lasted a week. Two survived the ordeal, but one of the men, Cleve Cole, died. In the book, his spirit continues to wander lost over the high plains, and the narrator comes to identify with Cleve Cole: he too is lost and dying, unable to find his way out of the blizzard that is the AIDS epidemic.

VJC: *You employ magical realism in the book. The narrator has gone without sleep for more than 30 hours, and the lines between his dreams, memories, imagination and hallucinations begin to blur, playing with the reader by raising the question of what is real and what is not.*

AER: Go 30 hours without sleep and the world can become magically real. I did want to capture the slipperiness of reality and the multi-dimensional nature of human consciousness.

VJC: *I’m wondering how you came to write the book. The novel is autobiographical, inspired in part by your experiences and by those of others you knew. Was it a therapeutic exercise?*

AER: All my books begin as therapeutic exercises. It’s how I work out ideas and feelings and memories. By turning them into stories. I had volunteered for an AIDS organization while in Australia, and when I returned to the States, I began working as the mental health specialist and later as the prevention program

manager at Cascade AIDS Project in Portland, Oregon. It took me twenty years to process those experiences before I could finally write the book.

VJC: *What did you hope to accomplish in writing this book?*

AER: I wanted to bear witness to a modern plague by telling these stories. How terrible it was, but also how there were moments of enormous grace and nobility and courage. I wanted to write it out and thereby make peace with that part of my life.

VJC: *Silencing the ghosts?*

AER: Perhaps more *respecting* the ghosts.

VJC: *In a foreword, you reflect on writing about the AIDS epidemic during the current coronavirus pandemic*

AER: Yes, we were wrapping up the manuscript in June (2020) and it was a good opportunity to consider the current epidemic in light of the earlier one, to weigh the similarities and the differences, and to find lessons and benefits that could help us through this difficult time of quarantining and mounting losses.

VJC: *The story suggests that a new birth and a new being can emerge from such tragedies as an epidemic.*

AER: Truly. A crisis, whether personal or national or global, is a kind of cauldron. From it can come catharsis, renewal, even transformation. One way to understand this current pandemic is as another opportunity for us to re-discover who we are as a people, as one humanity.

VJC: *There are many powerful and serious themes in this book. What is the dominant idea you would want readers to ponder long after they finish the last page?*

AER: That we are all temporary. That we have this brief time on earth and, to some extent, we can choose how we live it. Keats called existence this “vale of soul-making.” We can experience great loss and tragedy and emerge from it as better people, more whole through the experience of grief and grieving.

Read complete interview at www.alan-rose.com/bookchat/January-2021.

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Author's Note: On writing about the AIDS epidemic in a time of Covid-19

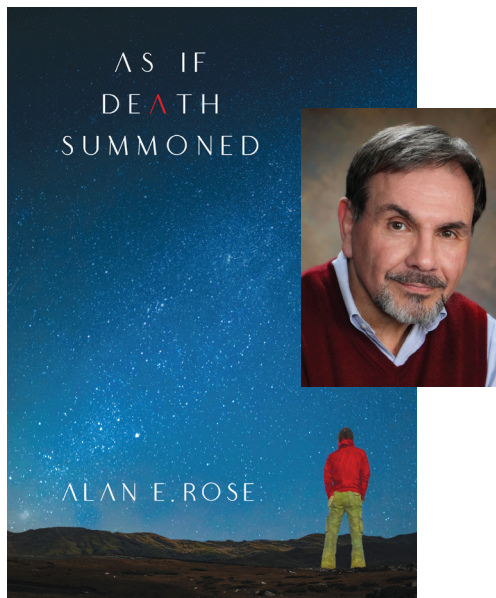
My publisher's attorneys assure me that this is a work of fiction and that all the people in it are fictional characters. Including President Reagan. Still, works of fiction carry their own truth, truth that transcends "facts" and "dates" and "names" and can speak beyond a specific time or a particular people. And in this current moment, we are in need of all the truth we can get.

I find a peculiar symmetry that, just as I am bringing one defining epidemic of my life to a close with this book, another epidemic begins. There are similarities between them beyond both being caused by viruses—a retrovirus earlier, a coronavirus now. Once again, we have a president slow on the uptake, realizing too late that he has a national health crisis on his watch and displaying an almost callous lack of concern and leadership. In both epidemics, it has been doctors and public health officials who have had to provide that missing leadership, often requiring them to delicately skirt political obstacles, egos, and ignorance—though in the earlier epidemic they were aided (some would say, terrorized) by AIDS activists fighting for their lives. And once again there is no vaccine, no cure to help stop the spread of contagion. (Contrary to some uninformed sources, the CDC has not found hydroxychloroquine to be effective against the coronavirus. They also strongly advise against ingesting bleach.) It took thirteen years before protease inhibitors transformed AIDS from being a death sentence to a manageable chronic condition, thirty years before the approval of a pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) that can help reduce the risk of becoming infected. We expect the timeline to find a vaccine for Covid-19 will be much shorter.

But there are also significant differences between the two epidemics: This time it is not happening to Those People, but to all of us. This time our government swung into quick(er) action, its delay measured in months, not years.

Another big difference: This time people care. Resources and funding for research were readily made available. The media provides daily updates on numbers infected and numbers of those who died. Mayors,

governors, the White House itself have given daily briefings. Also a major difference, this time we know what we are dealing with and began to marshal a nationwide response, however clumsy and uncoordinated, to



combat it. For much of the first two years of the AIDS epidemic, it was a mystery why gay men were getting sick and dying.

Many of the emotions amid this current epidemic are familiar: anxiety, fear, grief at the loss of loved ones, "anticipatory grief" of yet more losses to come. But there is no shame, no stigma in getting Covid-19—unless you were among those who loudly decried it as a political hoax. That could be a bit embarrassing.

Today, once again it is the poor and communities of color who are disproportionately affected by this epidemic due to limited, little or no health coverage, and an ongoing legacy of racial inequality. As in earlier epidemics, there are always "those people" who are not us. Until they are.

There were benefits and lessons learned from the AIDS epidemic, gained at a terrible cost: medical advances, advances in public health policy and strategies for tracking and combating an epidemic. Also, societal advances in the decriminalizing and de-

perverting of gay people in the public's mind. What gay activists had been asking their queer brothers and sisters to do for decades—coming out to families and friends, to coworkers and fellow church members—was finally accomplished, often by a terrible necessity. ("Mom, Dad, I'm gay...I'm also dying.") The AIDS epidemic became the occasion for young gay men in San Francisco, in Los Angeles and New York City, to "come out" to their families back in Iowa, in Vermont, in Louisiana and Wyoming. As a friend once said, "It's a helluva way to come out of the closet." People across the country began to discover that "those people" were their own sons, and brothers, and nephews and uncles, that They were us. They always had been.

What will we gain this time, I wonder. What benefits and lessons will we learn? It's too early to yet grasp the full impact of this epidemic on our lives, but we already suspect it will be profound, wide-reaching, deep and lasting. Many of us realize we will never be returning to Normal. And maybe that's okay. We can do better.

At the very most, we can hope that our global community will emerge from this viral crucible stronger, wiser, more compassionate, guided by the better angels of our human nature. History tells us that some will; and it tells us some won't, not until a vaccine is finally developed and deployed against our common ignorance, our bigotry and prejudices. And even then, there will always be the anti-vaxxers.

At the very least, we may come out of this current pandemic with a better understanding of who we are as a people, and as individual persons, so that when we, too, are finally "summoned," we may depart with more wisdom, greater self-awareness, and perhaps not so much strangers to ourselves.

Alan Rose
Lewis River Valley
Washington State
June 2020

“... revelatory, cathartic, and inspiring, all in one package ... As If Death Summoned evokes the ultimate paradox... that nothing confirms and sweetens life and living like the direct confrontation with death and dying. That bittersweet sentiment permeates this book, and offers us, besides a dramatic chronicle of suffering and loss, hopefulness and humor...”

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