

**THE
LIE
CALLED
CANCER**

A DIVINE COMEDY

ALAN SEARLE

The Lie Called Cancer: A Divine Comedy

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Some material in this book was adapted from essays published online at Pleasant Lines: <https://alansearle.media>. You can read cool stuff there for free, and also buy my first book.

Some people's names were changed. They will undoubtedly be grateful.

The author is responsible for any factual errors in the text. Emphasis by underlining is made by the author in some cases. All photographs by the author.

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This book is dedicated with much love to the Faithful Prayers: Christa-Maria Sanders, Daniel Herring, Gaëtan Dennemont, Irene Grainger, Jessie Boston, Melanie Searle, Susannah Wynne and the Reverend Tim Jones.

Also to Alex, Anne, Beth, Bex, Catherine C., Catherine Q., Corey, Daniel, Dave, David, Debbie, Elaine, Gail, Gary, Geert, Geoffrey, Jackie, Jago, James, Jamie, Janet, Joey, Joshua, Kathy, Kit, Laurice, Leanne, Lesley, Mary, Mary Alice, Matt, Mia, Miriam, Mollie, Myrtle, Newell, Pamela, Peggy, Rachel, Ros, Rosie, Rozi, Ruth, Sam, Samson, Sandy, Sarah, Steve, Tami, Tim, Thomas, Tom, Voldemar, and everyone else who prayed in Jesus' name, including unnamed teammates at the Healing Rooms of SW London, and my lovely #BRRG family around the world.

You are all more powerful than you can imagine.

In fact, Jesus says so right here in John 14.13-14: 'I will do whatever you ask in My name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.'

And again here: 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.' (Matthew 7.7-8)

And again here: 'Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you will receive them, and you will have them.' (Mark 11.24)

Finally, consider what the Lord's brother said when he got in on the act: 'The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.' (James 5.16, NLT)

Imagine that. You asked, God heard you, and He answered.

Author's Note

I almost titled this book 'The *Joke Called Cancer*' but thought that might offend you if you've lost a loved one to this horrible disease. If that's the case, I stand with you in your grief. No one should die from cancer. It's a scourge from hell.

Despite that, I had to write this book (mostly) as light-hearted comedy. I didn't always find laughs during my journey, but the moments without joy were rare, even in the midst of terror and despair.

I was also tempted to title it 'Cancer Is a Lie From The Devil And We Laugh At Him.' But I figured that would turn you off if you don't believe in the devil.* You might even have questioned my sanity. So that was out. Not that I'm concerned anyone think I'm dotty. You're free to do so; it's your prerogative, since you bought the book.

The Lie Called Cancer is provocative enough. Writing a book about lies may be unremarkable, because lies are so commonplace. We all lie, and it's easy to conclude that lies consume the world: consider our politics, our work, mass media, fake news, much literature, too many relationships, the delusion that those jeans actually *don't* make your butt look fat.†

Like lies, cancer is also commonplace. Unlike a lie, cancer frightens people. You say the word 'cancer' and ears prick up; heads turn. It gets attention. Putting the word 'cancer' in a book title is smart marketing.

Thanks for agreeing with me on that, and buying this book.

* There are way too many of you.

† In my experience, it's never the jeans, it's always the Ben and Jerry's.

Foreword

This book may not be for you. That's because we'll talk a lot about my penis, my bladder, urination, and a bit about defecation and other cringe-worthy topics.* A truthful tale about bladder[†] cancer is like that. To mangle an aphorism, if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the loo.

On the other hand, this book may be for you, because you need a laugh and want to be uplifted in these wretched times. The book has a happy ending, after all. Whoops. I forgot your spoiler alert warning there! Too bad.

There are many things in this story that can't be explained other than to say God did it. I can't claim it was all coincidence. Remember, truth is always stranger than fiction. You may actually think that parts of this story are downright weird, even though they are all true.

I agree with you. But there's an excellent reason for the weirdness. It's because God is weird. He's really weird. He's like, beyond anyone's comprehension weird. He's shake your head in disbelief and fire up Netflix to binge on *Stranger Things* weird.

Seriously, have you actually read the Bible? Donkeys talking, axe heads floating, the sun standing still, men running faster than horses. God even comes to earth as a man. People are raised from the dead. Your sins are forgiven.

Speaking of *stranger things*...

But don't worry. Modern medicine is weird too. Really weird. It's shake your head in disbelief and fire up Netflix to binge on *House* weird. That's because it's all about the body.

* Prostate alert!

† I just think the word 'bladder' itself is amusing. Say it aloud ten times and see if you agree. Get a toddler to say it ten times. Amusing is good, because this book is meant to induce laughter and we'll say 'bladder' together a lot in the coming pages.

And raw biology is often quick to turn heads. And stomachs. Medicine may be weird, but the people who practice it definitely are not. They are lovely. Every last one of them.

I'm immensely indebted to all the physicians, nurses, assistants, specialists, technicians, receptionists, administrators, runners, cleaners and volunteers who toil so lovingly and devotedly in Britain's National Health Service (NHS), particularly at Kings College and Guy's Hospitals, and most especially at Guys' Cancer-Free Centre.

You cannot be praised enough.

Too often when I offered a compliment, you'd respond with typical British modesty, saying, 'Well, I try!'

I'm here to say with unbridled American enthusiasm: 'You succeed!'

About This Book

This book is written chronologically from my personal journals between April 2019 and April 2020. The chapter headings are the dates of the journal entries. So, if you watch the chapter headings perspicaciously*, you won't get lost.

The idea for this book arrived in late January 2020, after which I began assembling notes and writing an outline. Fast and furious scrivening† began in early February. My goal was to finish all but the final chapter by 24 April, when I was originally scheduled for a post-treatment consultation.

The plan was to immediately go home after that conversation, write the happy ending to this book, and publish it. We'll just see how that worked out.

*Alan Searle
London, United Kingdom
25 May, 2020*

* 'Perspicaciously' means acutely, or with penetrating mental discernment. That's you, Dear Reader. And, I promise not to drop any more five syllable words on you, unless they are medical terms.

† This is a nod to Aunt Sandy, who's the only one who won't want to redact the joke.

How to Use This Book

Simply enough, you just turn from one page to the next until you're done.

Then you go to my website (<https://alansearle.media>) and sign up for my newsletter because you can't wait to find out more about what I'm writing next.

There are many footnotes in this book, some relevant, and some annoying. This is where many of the jokes reside. My wife Melanie thinks I overdid the footnotes, particularly in my Ameri-centric dissection of the oddities of British culture and use of the language. I assured her these notes are meant to be deliberately aggravating.*

She also recently commented incredulously† about a book she read that had two Forewords, a Preface *and* an Introduction.

So, I added this extra section to be annoying to her. I succeed at that so rarely.

She's a saint like that.

* You'll find British usage throughout this book because it makes me look more intellectual. Also, my UK spell check prefers UK English. Also also, as I now live in the UK, I should, out of respect, learn the language. I *have* mastered saying 'SHED-jule' for 'SKED-jul' and 'PROH-gress' for 'PRAH-gress' (which makes me sound to my American ears like I'm a Canadian), but I'll be durned if I can say 'GARE-udge' without feeling exceedingly self-conscious.

† Okay, so I lied about the five syllable thing.



PART ONE:

ARREST



5 February, 2020

Before we begin, I want you to know a few things about me. Above all else, I'm a person who seeks to live in a state of unbounded joy. I'd like to believe that Bliss is my middle name. If there's a cloud, I search for the silver lining. If there's a pile of manure, that means there's a pony around here somewhere. There is no downside, ever. Well, not quite.

The truth is that all these attitudes were challenged greatly during the year covered in this book, and I uncovered some that were not so savoury. I faced direct threats to my life, my physical health, my emotional well-being and my spiritual underpinnings. There were times when my compass needle spun wildly.

I do talk about God a bit in this book, because I believe in Him, and He plays more than a big part in the story. If you're a Christian, you'll be okay with this (probably). If not, you'll happily find that I quote Scripture as little as possible. You may be uninterested in it, and I can't effectively evangelise in a book like this anyway. Invite me for drinks instead; we'll tackle it there. You can leave when you are truly pissed (take that either way).

There is *some* discussion of Scripture, but only to give you a better idea of where I'm coming from. You can pretend those bits are the Russian names in The Brothers Karamazov if you like. Just blink past them. If you don't believe in 'supernatural' stuff, but still want to enjoy this book, you get to overlook a few things. It might be easier than you think.

Here's how. You may already want to believe in a Harry Potter universe (because Riddikulus, or more practically, Accio!) or the Cthuhlu Mythos, so why not give this a shot? It's no

weirder than those are. And, in fairness, while I don't believe in Harry Potter's magic myself, it doesn't mean I can't enjoy the literature. You'll live, and you'll laugh. You only have to wade through a few paragraphs anyway. Here are two of them.

God is good. That's theology 101. He also involves Himself in my daily affairs to the extent I invite Him to do so. I believe in things supernatural and prophetic, and I know that God has spoken to me (and others, on my behalf) many times. This is my normal. So don't be surprised when this pops up in the story.

Because of that Christian bit, I fully believe that the prayers of many people were instrumental in my resistance to side-effects and ultimately to the health I enjoy today. Without prayer, I believe things would have turned out for the worse if not the worst.

In fact, it's all in my medical record! If you like, I'll send you a copy (you pay outrageous shipping and handling). Regarding all the above, I don't need to explain something in order to believe it's true. You can't explain how you think, but are certain that you do. Or think you do, anyway.

Next, while this book is ostensibly about treatment for cancer, it's moreover a story about my spiritual healing. The psychological effects of receiving a cancer diagnosis and the rigours of cancer treatment are understandably severe. Living through them while *thriving joyfully* must have been God's doing. It wasn't mine.

Finally, I believe two other things: As of this writing, 5 February 2020, I'm free from cancer, and I'll live the rest of my life without it troubling me again. The doctors haven't caught up with the first part - I'm not due in the CT and MRI suites until mid-April 2020, some eight or nine weeks from this writing. As for the second part, only God knows, but I trust Him.

Those are all the things I want you to know about me. Here are the things doctors would want you to know about me: I'm a 63 year old white American male of British extraction, a

former cigarette smoker (40 years) with some cancer in my family history. The medics are not surprised to see me.

6 February, 2020

Every so often, now that it's over, I like to revisit the scene of the crime. Let's look back 41 weeks ago.

18 April, 2019

The scene is a certain urinal in a certain South London supermarket. The crime was the appearance of a blood clot the size of a pea. Life did a full stop for a few beats as I stared at it, astonished that such a thing should fall out of my body. Bright red, it contrasted sharply against the fresh white porcelain. For a moment I imagined it pulsing with a life of its own, ready to snarl, turn viciously and attack. I stepped away feeling violated.

'Babe,' I said, rejoining my wife in the aisles. 'We need to head to the GP now, and put off the shopping until tomorrow.' Melanie looked puzzled, but only until I explained. Then it was her turn to have life do a full stop for a few beats. We abandoned the shopping and headed out.

It was the Thursday before Easter, and my surgery* was about to close for four days. They squeezed me in for a quick consultation. I left a sample in a bottle (results not to be known for a week due to the holiday). Dr. Kuracisto gave me a course of antibiotic 'in case its just a urinary tract infection.'

Well, it wasn't that. It eventually turned out to be bigger than that. It was a crime, and the crime was a lie. It was the lie called cancer.

19 April, 2019

I didn't know it was supposed to be a cancer then, of course. It was way too early to think seriously about cancer anyway, and I didn't. The blood could be from many causes. Until I had more information, there was nothing to do but wait.

It's so easy to think worst-case when something happens to my body, especially with a vivid imagination like mine. That pain in my knee? Could be an inflammation. If it's inflammation, it might be arthritis. In fact, it probably *is* arthritis. Arthritis is incurable and untreatable. It's probably rheumatoid arthritis. My mum had that, and it can be inherited. So, for sure, that's it.

Before long I have myself so crippled in my mind I'm ready to shop for a wheelchair and a van with a lift. You never know how soon I might need one, right? Best to be prepared! Why do I automatically think worst-case about my body? Well, it's not like I can quickly whip out a list of *best-case* items when blood-

* 'Surgery' is *doctor's office* to my American readers. It's also, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, 'the regular period of time when a person can visit their Member of Parliament to ask advice.' I'll refrain from making any cutting political remarks.

in-the-urine is involved. I've thought about that for almost a year now, and I still don't have item #1.

Faced with a potentially scary track ahead, my train of thought derails immediately, instead of pulling into a bright shiny station with free coffee and helpful baggage handlers. Those noisy worst-case scenarios always shove to the front of the queue, waving their First Class tickets, ready to ride my train all the way to the last stop.

Let's face it, even a ridiculously optimistic person like me sometimes has to throw in the towel and conclude the only positive aspect of the situation is that I had an extra towel to begin with. But I'd ride that train to the last stop as well. I had no choice.

22 April, 2019

It's an odd sensation to stand before a toilet and wonder what's about to come out. It had been so easy to take urination for granted. I'd never concerned myself with it. Have you? Isn't peeing an unthinking act? Until now, my experience only involved pee. But, when you add blood, urination morphs into the fancy Greek medical term haematuria.

Now that I was focused on the bleeding, I also became aware of some discomfort during the act itself. The discomfort was probably there before the previous Thursday's display made it all obvious, but I hadn't noticed. If I had, my trip to the GP would have happened much earlier, I suppose. But I didn't. And so, here we are.

In the absence of information, how to proceed? Step one for me always should be to pray. That's what Christians learn. It's supposed to be automatic, like gently turning *into* a skid when

your car fishtails. I constantly surprise myself at how often prayer is *not* my first choice. I turn away from the skid more often than I care to admit.

Then, when I do finally get around to prayer, I must remember that not all prayers are created equal. True prayer involves surrender to God's will. Anything else is a demand. Let me give you a little Theology 101 about that. Only a couple of paragraphs. Hang in there.

I'll start here: it's inarguable to me that God is good, 100 percent. If not, why believe in Him? Evil is not from God. It's either caused by the devil, is influenced by the devil, or results from my own sin. The Bible reveals this repeatedly from the first page to the last.

Because God is good, he couldn't have created cancer, or any other illness for that matter, your love of the book of Job notwithstanding. End of Theology 101. If you aren't a Christian, you now have a pivotal choice.

You can take my word for all this and keep reading (your best option IMHO*). Or, you can study the Bible for yourself to see if it's true and then come back. I'll see you in a few months – you'll need to be thorough. Or, you can put the book down, say it was a bad investment and go read *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* for the third time.

If you care to know more about why I believe these things, you can read my memoir, [Masterpiece \(A Love Story\)](#), which is available through Amazon. Yeah, I know – its a shameless plug. But hey – I'm an author, and I sell books to put bread on the table. Or into the bank account, as the case may be.

* In My Holy Opinion