



## Koolaids: The Art of War

*Rabih Alameddine*

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## **Koolaids: The Art of War** Rabih Alameddine

Detailing the impact of the AIDS epidemic and the Lebanese civil war in Beirut on a circle of friends and family, "Koolaids" tells the stories of characters who can no longer love or think except in fragments of time, each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears. Clips, quips, vignettes and hallucinations, tragic news reports and hilarious short plays, conversations with both the quick and the dead, all shine their combined lights to reveal the way we experience life today in this ambitious novel.

## **Koolaids: The Art of War Details**

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Author : Rabih Alameddine

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## From Reader Review Koolaids: The Art of War for online ebook

### Denny says

4.3\*. alameddine's first novel is quite challenging. it is challenging in form {non-linear, free form prose at times, poetry at times, you are never quite sure who is expressing their views at times} and in subject matter {the aids epidemic, the lebanese civil war and the meaning of life}. alameddine is very nationalistic but at the same time, hates the lebanese for hating him because he is a homosexual. it is an angry book as he hates equally israel and syria for how they are destroying his country with america's involvement a close third. the sex scenes are at times graphic and they are interchangeable with the violence. the mood of the book is at time hilarious and at time profound. it sure makes me want to learn more about the history of lebanon.

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### Vivek Tejuja says

When you write a book about AIDS and what it brings in its wake, is not an easy task for sure. Rabih Alameddine jumped to the scene and was well-known right after "An Unnecessary Woman". The book just jumped at readers and they I think too notice of him then. Of course before that, there was "Koolaids" and some more books that he had written but this discussion is about "Koolaids".

To me reading "Koolaids" was a harrowing experience. Why? Because I am gay and I didn't know how to react to a book on AIDS, and what it takes in its wake. I cannot for the life of me imagine something like this happening to me or my loved ones, so whenever I read something like this, I am completely overwhelmed by it.

"Koolaids" is about men who love men, men who suffer by loving men and men who cope as their worlds fall apart and changes around them. It is a fresh new voice (then when the book released) and is very different from his other books. It details the AIDS epidemic through the 80s and the 90s and with that the angle of the Lebanese Civil War that accounts for the book.

The characters are plenty – they love and dream in fragments. As a reader, I just gave in to the book without trying to make much of it in the first fifty pages and when I started, I was too entranced by the language and over all plot to care about the writing.

"Koolaids" is what it is – a gritty and real book on what it takes to go on living in the face of death and how to sometimes just give in, knowing that nothing can be done now. It is stories such as these that deeply affect us and our lives.

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### Heather says

meh. not nearly as good as his other books, you can tell it's his first novel. strongly recommend both hakawati and an unnecessary woman.

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### **Karem Mahmoud says**

It is a book raising AIDS, civil war in Lebanon, and conflicts amongst Lebanese territory for thirty years. I like the structure and the form.

When it comes to content, I think it's full of rage, anger and negative signs in spite of some shining situations therein.

I had to read a university thesis explaining in detail the book and the thoughts raised within its pages.

I don't criticize the author for his approach, neither agree on it.

After all, there is a message to pass here. For me, the author reacted repeatedly rather than acting. It's a book of reactions

I guess that anyone reads the book would agree that it is a DIFFERENT book, DIFFERENT style. One of its few advantages

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### **Monica Bond-Lamberty says**

Have loved the books by Rabih Alameddine so this was a disappointment compared to those.

Part of the problem for me was the constantly changing narrator (and I couldn't always tell who was who).

So couldn't tell whose opinion on certain things I was hearing.

It was frustrating, but also went in with very high expectations and those are hard to live up to sometimes.

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### **Trish Little says**

An amazing book!!! It read more like poetry than prose. AIDS and Lebanon are two things that I am not that familiar with but the humanity in which he writes about them makes them very familiar. He is at times hilarious and always irreverent. I enjoyed this book very much!

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### **Brent says**

I read it again for the third time. Amazing book. A literary feast for me. The tragedy of AIDS / the civil war in Lebanon / a mediation on life. The Arab world as you might not expect.

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### **Jessica says**

"Man is nothing more than giant genitalia for viruses."

"I yearn for a moment I know nothing of.

I pine for a feeling, as impression of myself as content, fulfilled. At times, I feel it as a yearning for a lover, someone to share my life with, someone to laugh with. I loved, lost, and loved again. The longing never abated. I was only distracted for a little while. I searched for the elusive grail.

In that moment, I envision myself joyous, spiritually felicitous. When I shut my eyes, I feel the possibility of the moment. I long to understand.

Someday, I used to tell myself. Someday, I will know the moment I yearn for, someday.

I wait for the peace beyond all understanding.

I lie on my deathbed waiting.

I yearn for a moment I know nothing of."

"Easter. My favorite holiday. A deeply philosophical time of the year when I ponder what on earth a bunny rabbit has to do with eggs and why, if they beat you, spit on you, and nail you to a cross, you'd want to call that particular Friday a Good Friday? If that happened to me, I'd call it The Worst Friday of My Life. But that's why Jesus is The Redeemer and I'm just another nobody."

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### **Sabrina says**

I want to read about living with, and dying of, AIDS! No no, I want to read about the Lebanese civil war! Thanks to this book, you can have both.

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### **Mattilda says**

Okay, how much bolder can you get than comparing the Lebanese Civil War to the AIDS crisis? Scathing, hilarious, and over-the-top-- from a painter who copies bad paintings of naked Asian boys to an analysis of Sodom and Gomorrah where Lot is the obvious pimp to a transition between checkpoints in Beirut and "the good old days" of condomless sex-- really, who doesn't want to drink the Kool-Aid?

Oh -- and another painter whose sells abstract work for high-end US galleries, but really it's not abstract at all but pictures of the doorways of Lebanese houses. Alameddine skewers the art world and an endless lineup of "great thinkers" from Nietzsche to Muriel Spark. Or maybe he's invoking them. Really, what's the difference, anyway? Did EM Forster really say, "Death destroys a man: the idea of Death saves him?"

Sure, there are moments when the book gets a little gimmicky, but when the narrator is making fun of the gimmicks, all you can do is keep reading, let your mouth hang open. From a dream of eating the piano because siblings know how to cut up the pie to a description of the Centers for Disease Control as the "post office with white lab coats" -- yes, give me more...

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### **Jessika Malo says**

I bought this book as a gift for my American boyfriend to learn more about Lebanon and to get another perspective on its war (a different one than mine) and I bought one for myself to read simultaneously. I was not particularly interested in the war related stories because I am sickened by them but I was fond of the how

the writer weaved the stories into each other and made the complex simple. His comments were sharp and straight to the point; his honesty very appreciated.

I was also fond of his sarcastic voice all over the book. I have to say that i finished the book in two days and i tried to control myself and pause and take it in slowly but the words kept rushing to me, easy to devour, easy to shake me.

Another thing that i liked about this is how relevant it still is, probably because time in Lebanon waltzes slowly...

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### **Sarah Makarem says**

Despite its fragmented narrative that is somehow hard to comprehend with multiple narrators, this book grants the reader a dramatic yet a genuine outlook of the Lebanese history,civil war and its community through the eyes of different personas shedding light on expatriates, homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic back in the late 80's early 90's. If you are a fan of puzzles, then you have picked the right book to trigger your mind with Alameddine exceptional narration.

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### **Rambox says**

On page 118 Alameddine explains the book: "I wanted to write an endless book of time. It would have no beginning and no end. It would not flow in order. The tenses would make no sense. A book whose first page is almost identical to the last, and all the pages in between are jumbled with an interminable story. A book which would make both Kant and Jung proud. I was not able to do it. Besides, I would have been copying the master. Borges did it before me."

This, of course, occurs after pages 37 and 38, in which Krishna and Julio Cortázar are imagined in conversation. Cortázar asks "...do we have to wait until someone dies before we find his life's unity, the sum of all the actions that define a life? The problem consists in grasping that unity without becoming a hero, without becoming a saint, or a criminal, or a boxing champ, or a statesman, or a shepherd; to grasp unity in the midst of diversity, so that unity might be the vortex of a whirlwind." Krishna complains, "Why is it you humans constantly search for a deeper meaning?" Cortázar replies, "to sell books." Krishna explains, "What if I told you life has no unity? It is a series of nonlinear vignettes leading nowhere, a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. It makes no sense, enjoy it." Krishnamurti jumps in, "the purpose of life is to understand it." As becomes clear through the book, they are all right.

Representation without substance, without power, is not enough. And yet, although I greatly enjoyed this book for the witty playfulness and the laughs - justified by an intelligent ruse message about fragmentation (which also enables the AIDS-Lebanon parallels) - what I most enjoyed about the book was that it simply exists. This mix of gayness and Americanness and Arabness speaks to me. I didn't find the book especially challenging - just some good fun - but it does give a sense that one exists beyond oneself, that a 'we' exists, and that this 'we' has its own community, imaginary, writers and literature (Alameddine). For me, that is beautiful.

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## Michael says

One of the best books I've ever read: a Borges-esque take on AIDS, Lebanese-Americans, and gay identities. A series of vignettes told from a variety of voices; time and location fold on themselves, and I am left wondering who is speaking and realizing, somewhat ironically, that it doesn't matter. Humorous in its serious understanding of futility and hope and death and longing. Up there with Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude* and David Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* as one of my favorite works.

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## Angelina says

This book is dazzling. I love the way it's structured. I wrote an annotation on it and really loved the exploration of themes. I think the prose is pitch perfect and the way he writes about life is sharp and accurate.

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## Margot says

I read this book after being blown away by The Hakawati (speaking of underlining book titles, the MLA has changed their guidelines to suggest italics instead), and wanted to read something else by Alameddine. There is not much of comparison between the two works. The multiple narrative perspectives are there in both books, Lebanon as seen by an expatriot, but the similarities end there.

Koolails makes parallels between war-torn Lebanon and the gay community torn apart by the AIDS epidemic. The main perspective is Mohammad, a painter from Lebanon who moves to the United States and is part of a close community of gay men. We experience the civil war in Lebanon and the AIDS epidemic through the lenses of several characters: a mother's diary in Lebanon; recollections of dreams; quotations from famous authors; humorous scenes based on the Bhagavad Gita; memories from members of the community in San Francisco. The narrative unravels like the delirious end-of-life ramblings of an invalid, and it is often difficult to tell who is who.

Let's see a sample:

"In normal situations calling oneself a bookworm may not be pejorative; however, this was a gay BBS [computer bulletin board:], which the majority, if not all, of the men used to cruise for sex. In this case, it was the kiss of death."(32)

"Do you realize if antidepressants were available fifty years ago, the existentialists could have been happy? We would have been spared reading so many dull books."(44)

"So here we have the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroys the faggots with fire and brimstone. He turns a disobedient wife into salt. But he asks us to idolize drunks who sleep with their daughters or offer them to a horny, unruly mob."(64)

"I just read the peace plan in Lebanon between Hizballah and Israel. It sounds like a tag team professional wrestling match with too many referees."(79)

"*Ya Rabbi Tegi Fi Aino* is an Egyptian virus, first discovered in June of 1967, probably in the Sinai. It afflicts

Semites in the Middle East, both Arabs and Israelis. Those infected with the virus are known to close their eyes, and fire, hoping to hit something. Translated from the Egyptian dialect, *Ya Rabbi Tegi Fi Aino* means "Oh God, I hope this gets him in the eye."(97)

"I always thought AIDS should be a trademark of Burroughs Wellcome. You know, AIDS(TM) is a registered trademark of Burroughs Wellcome, use of this trademark without paying royalties to its rightful owner is a crime punishable by a slow, torturous, torturous death."(167)

"All I can say is, I am glad I'm not Christian. For us Muslims, we just stone adulterers to death, which is much more humane than guilt."(175)

"Easter. My favorite holiday. A deeply philosophical time of the year when I ponder what on earth a bunny rabbit has to do with eggs and why, if they beat you, spit on you, and nail you to a cross, you'd want to call that particular Friday a Good Friday? If that happened to me, I'd call it The Worst Friday of My Life."(196)

"I was sitting, smoking a pipe by the fire, when Updike asked me, 'What more fiendish proof of cosmic irresponsibility than a Nature which, having invented sex as a way to mix genes, then permits to arise, amid all its perfumed and hypnotic inducements to mate, a tireless tribe of spirochetes and viruses that torture and kill us for following orders?'"(237)

"Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left Cleveland at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, the other from Topeka at 4:19 p.m. at a speed of 35 mph."(240)

"Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever."(240)

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### **mtthw says**

nonlinear and a little annoying.

this is the kind of book that people say that like because it gives them mad street cred, but really i'm too old and not artsy fartsy enough for that anymore. don't get me wrong, there were some powerful moments, but i got the impression the author knew they were powerful so that negates a bunch of it in my head.

what i did enjoy was the small bits of history and culture of a people that white kids like myself don't know enough about.

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### **Macartney says**

An ancient tale. Magical, incisive, dreamlike, floating among narrators in a fog of time, place and character. Blurring and blending hate, love, death and life, it is near biblical in its scope and essence. A deft and poetic exploration of tribes vs. the "other"--for without one the other cannot exist, of what it means to be a family--inherent and created, of loyalty--and where does/should loyalty lie... But ultimately about what it means to be human, homo sapien or just plain homo. Alameddine exposes and excavates an elemental raw, gut truth that is oh so painful to listen to but oh so necessary to hear. Listen, and hear those moans and cries of woe for

thee too shall one day mourn and, hopefully, be mourned.

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### **Lena♥Ribka says**

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1) Continuously changing narrating: CONFUSING? yes. IMPORTANT? No. I wasn't able to say for sure WHO was narrating at the moment. But I also noticed that I didn't c

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### **Lilium says**

I liked so many parts of this book, I just wish it's a little more cohesive, at times I didn't knew who the hell is narrating which part. I think I'll read it a few times, just to grasp it better.

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