



The
Dragon
& the
Hummingbird

*A not-for-profit
allegory for our times*

by Gramskii
illustrations by Taz

G r a m s k i i

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Gramskii

The Dragon & the Hummingbird

By Gramskii (Graham Hall)
Illustrations by Taz (Paul Taylor)

A Gramskii Book

him. Something about seeking out brave new worlds, or some such banal shit... probably.

But that wasn't what George was getting at.

"It was among the strongest feelings of grief I have ever encountered. The contrast between the vicious coldness of space and the warm nurturing of Earth below filled me with overwhelming sadness.

Everybody else was shaking bottles of champagne, but I didn't feel that way at all. I was not celebrating. I was shaking my fists at the gods.

Every day, we are confronted with the knowledge of further destruction of Earth at our hands: the extinction of animal species, of flora and fauna... things that took five billion years to evolve, and suddenly, we will never see them again, because of mankind's interference. It filled me with dread."

The bar fell silent for a beat and it was the Director's turn to be impressed, caught off guard by George's sober eloquence.

7.4. All Together Now

"Well, that's sobered you both up," said Faye, who'd been listening whilst drying glasses. This was, by some margin, the most fascinating conversation she'd had while working behind this bar. It was the most exciting conversation she'd had *anywhere*, since her boyfriend had tried to impress her by taking her to a Noam Chomsky lecture called *Manufacturing Consent*⁸⁰ (it had worked). And now here she was, casually chatting with a world-renowned actor and a formidable director, who also, it turned out, was an outspoken socialist. She

⁸⁰ **Manufacturing Consent:** The Political Economy of the Mass Media (1988) is a book by linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky (co-authored by Edward S. Herman) which describes the role played by mass media in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. It argues that mass media outlets, despite their claims of objectivity and impartiality, often serve the interests of powerful political and economic elites. <https://chomsky.info>

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wasn't going anywhere anytime soon... But that didn't stop her from asking awkward questions.

"Well, that's all very profound and very, very sad," Faye said, locking eyes with the Director. "And clearly, it's our duty to try and do something about it. But are you seriously telling me that all we need to do to save the planet is just be a little nicer to each other? If you don't mind me saying, that sounds a little er... lame. I think Marx would've dismissively called it *Utopian Socialism*⁸¹."

"What's that?" asked George, now feeling increasingly sidelined by the two political propeller-heads beside him.

"Well," D replied, picking up the thread, "back in the 19th century, a bunch of political movements emerged claiming capitalism was inherently bad and that a better, fairer world was just around the corner."

"Not unlike the vision *you're* selling us now," Faye teased.

Choosing to ignore the jab, the Director pressed on. "Robert Owen was a good example. He was a remarkable Welsh mill owner who created his first 'model village' up in Lanarkshire. Later, he took his ideas to the United States and tried to build a utopian society in a place called *New Harmony*⁸². But, sadly, these grand schemes never stood a chance," D continued. "Owen's local

⁸¹ **Utopian Socialism** was a social movement that emerged in the 19th century, advocating the creation of egalitarian societies and cooperative communities where resources were shared and individuals lived in harmony with one another and with nature. Key figures associated include Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint, Simon, who proposed various models for organising society based on principles of solidarity, mutual aid, and collective ownership of property. While utopian socialism failed to trigger widespread social change they contributed to ongoing debates about the possibility of more just and humane societies.

Utopian Socialism: Origin, Characteristics, Experiments www.sociologygroup.com

⁸² **New Harmony**, Indiana was established in 1814 as a German utopian community by led by Johann Georg Rapp. In 1825, the community sold the town to Robert Owen. Under Owen's leadership, New Harmony attracted intellectuals, scientists, and social reformers from around the world, becoming a centre for innovation and communal living. However, internal conflicts and financial difficulties led to the dissolution of the experiment by the late 1820s. Despite its short, lived existence, New Harmony remains a symbol of idealistic experimentation, communal living and social reform.

New Harmony by Katharine Dos Passos and Edith Shay www.theatlantic.com

competitors saw him as a threat to their access to cheap labour, so they closed ranks and undercut the goods his community was producing. In the end, these little utopian islands of hope were gradually reabsorbed into the wider capitalist marketplace."

"So what's to stop the *GRiFTers* from squashing *your* ideas the same way they squashed Robert Owen's?" George asked, intrigued and, for the first time, a little concerned.

"Another good question," replied D. "Well, as I've said before, I'm hoping that a clear explanation of how we got into this mess will mobilise not just the working class, but the middle class as well. And once we've got the middle class on board, the *GRiFTers* will have no one left to sell their products to. Nowhere to go. And we'll do to them what they did to *New Harmony*."

"And when that happens," he added, "capitalism, as we know it, will simply fade away."

"I hope you're right," said Faye, trying to believe him, but unable to hide her scepticism.

"I've got a couple more ideas that might help."

"Really?" She raised an eyebrow, "because this still feels like a bit of a long shot."

"Will you allow me to describe them?"

"Be our guest," said George, swaying as he looked to Faye for backup and almost falling off his chair in the process.

"Well, as I've already said, the first thing we have in our favour is *Spontaneous Order*. If we can collectively agree that we're on the road to self-destruction and would prefer *not* to go down in flames, we might decide, as a species, to do something about it. Like the starlings or the sardines fending off a threat. It won't rely on someone being in charge. No rulebook, no manifesto. We'll just take matters into our own hands and act independently, but also somehow, together. And if that happens, it might go viral and evolve into a global

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movement because, after all, it's a global crisis. I don't think there'll be any turning back once we've all uploaded these viral ideas into our *Collective Unconscious* ⁸³.

"Ur?" slurred George, worried he might have had a micro-nap and missed something. "The collective *what?*"

"Ah, yes! I should have mentioned this earlier!" said D sheepishly, before lighting up at the thought of describing something so close to his heart. "It's an idea that came from Carl Jung, back when he was studying different cultures. He kept noticing the same symbols, stories, and archetypes in completely separate parts of the world, often from vastly different times and places." He leaned in conspiratorially. "So, he concluded there must be some kind of shared memory bank. A *Collective Unconscious* that connects us all on a deeper level."

George blinked slowly, trying to keep up.

"And I believe," D said, now in full flow, "that once enough people realise how dangerous the free-market capitalist dragon is, we'll upload that awareness into the *Collective Unconscious*, like a sort of upgrade *patch* that triggers a moment of shared awakening. No manifesto. No revolution. Just *Spontaneous Order!*"

Faye tilted her head, intrigued.

"It'll be like a virus in the capitalist software which starts infecting the whole system until it crashes. Just like how the last remaining astronaut shut HAL down in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, after it began killing the crew."

"Yeah," mumbled George, eyes half-closed, "but that scene freaked me out. And what was that black oblong thing all about?"

⁸³ **The Collective Unconscious** is a concept developed by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, referring to a layer of the unconscious mind shared by all human beings, that serves as a reservoir of shared human experiences and wisdom that transcends individual consciousness. According to Jung, the collective unconscious influences individual development, cultural and religious beliefs, artistic expressions, and societal norms.

Carl Jung's Collective Unconscious Theory: What It Suggests About the Mind
www.verywellmind.com

Not wishing to get involved in that particular diversion, D continued. "If we stick with the computer analogy, this collective unconscious is like a kind of memory storage in the cloud that we unknowingly access and draw on. Perhaps another name for it might be the *Zeitgeist*. Maybe starlings know how to fly in those intricate patterns because they share the same *collective unconscious* programme. The biologist Rupert Sheldrake came up with a similar idea, he calls *morphic resonance*, and the French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin⁸⁴ believed that individuals can share information and ideas at an unconscious level.

"Think about that Nirvana album cover, for example, with the baby swimming underwater."

"*Nevermind*."

"No, I think this is a good example of our collective survival mechanism," insisted D. "A vital tool we'll need if we're going to escape capitalist annihilation."

"*Nevermind*," repeated George. "That's the name of the Nirvana album my dad used to play⁸⁵."

"Ah! Quite so!" accepted D, now realising what George was getting at. "Isn't it



weird how babies don't panic when submerged in water? I'd say that's an

⁸⁴ **Teilhard De Chardin** (1881, 1955) author of *The Human Phenomenon* and *The Divine Milieu*, was a Christian mystic and thinker who applied the Christian gospel to developments in modern science and evolution. <https://www.teilhard.org.uk>

⁸⁵ **Nevermind** album cover shot by photographer Kirk Weddle

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example of the collective unconscious. Maybe we share important survival information as part of our programming. So when we seed into our *collective unconscious* the idea that capitalism is killing us, critical mass will be achieved, *spontaneous order* will kick in And we'll all start cooperating, rather than competing."

"And we'll all live happily ever after." Said Faye, who'd been listened carefully to all of this, trying hard to keep an open mind. Unfortunately, everything she'd learned through the *Hegelian dialectic*⁸⁶ of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis made her want to scream, *THIS IS SUPERSTITIOUS BULLSHIT!* But, for fear of upsetting her guests, she kept her counsel. Instead, she said: "And when that happens, I suppose capitalism will collapse, just as Marx predicted. Only, if your theory is right, it won't be because the working class withheld their labour, but because the middle class withheld their consumption. Oh, the irony!"

"I have to admit, it's an amusing thought," agreed D, smiling in appreciation of Faye's astute analysis, even if he sensed she hadn't entirely bought into all of his ideas yet.

"OK." George was hoping to speed things along. "Any other ideas before we turn in for the night?"

The Director's eyes lit up. "Funny you should ask." "As a matter of fact, I have one more card up my sleeve."

"Why am I not surprised?" replied George, becoming increasingly monosyllabic. "Come on then, let's hear it."

⁸⁶ The **Hegelian dialectic** is a framework developed by the philosopher Hegel where an idea (thesis) is challenged by its opposite (antithesis), and their tension produces a new position (synthesis)—often repeating in cycles. **Understanding The Hegelian Dialectic – What it is and what it isn't**

"Well, it's this idea that if our best hope of survival is the pursuit of *Mutual Enlightened Self-Interest*, which I somewhat playfully call *MESI*⁸⁷, I hope you don't mind if this all now starts to get a bit *new age* and *woo-woo*."

"You're telling us this will be even more woo-woo than *Spontaneous Order* and the *Collective Unconscious*?" asked Faye, concerned she wouldn't be able to contain her inner Hegel for much longer.

"I know!" chuckled D, aware he was asking a lot of his audience. "This is difficult to imagine when our minds are so conditioned to be rational and pragmatic, but stick with me. Would it help to remind you that the whole point of the capitalist hegemony is to keep us *rational*, because we're easier to control if we don't think outside the box."

Faye thought about this for a moment and had to admit the Director was probably right, at least about that.

"You see," began D again, "the *GRiFTers* would like us to see the world as orderly and predictable, making it easier for them to manage and monetise it. However, I'm suggesting that the world isn't orderly, linear, and predictable at all. It's a very *MESI* place. Like it or not, it doesn't conform to the neat *Newtonian* model of physics, which assumes the world can be divided into nice little packets of 'stuff' that can be measured and sold.

"Instead, we live in a more *Quantum* universe, fluid and mysterious. A place where space and time are not what they seem. It's the difference between classical and quantum computers: one uses electrical impulses, like a telephone exchange, while the other operates at a subatomic level, where electrons exist as both particles *and* waves, meaning they can be in two places at the same time. Which, of course, breaks the laws of physics as we know them."

⁸⁷ **MESI**, (an acronym I invented, Ed.) An invitation to consider the world as too complex and interconnected to be broken into component parts and beyond the understanding of human intellect and therefore a concept that can only be experienced as an act of faith which leads to harmony, contentment and empathy with all of life.

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"Even though Einstein thought this was spooky, lots of experiments have since proven that this *is* how the universe works. As Niels Bohr put it: *Anyone who isn't shocked by quantum theory doesn't understand it*⁸⁸, and he should know, since he more or less discovered it.

"All of which is far too complicated to go into at two o'clock in the morning, but this is real."

"And this is important to our survival, why?" asked George.

"It's important for our survival because the more we embrace the concept of a quantum universe, the less capitalism is either applicable or relevant.

"Take the debate around Artificial Intelligence, for example. If the hype is to be believed, AI breaks the rules of capitalism because it will put huge numbers of people out of work. Humans will simply become surplus to requirements, and if that's the case, what happens next? At that point, we have to ask whether the system is working for us or if we are working for the system.

"And right now, the *GRIFTers* have no answers to that question. Or maybe they do, but they're just not telling us.

"You see, capitalism is a predictable algorithm. But the universe we live in is *MESI*, and we'll have to learn to be far more flexible and *MESI* ourselves if we want to evolve and survive within it.

"The current system requires the capitalists to remain in control, but that, quite simply, doesn't work for the rest of us.

"We can't always be in control of what's happening around us, but what we *can* do is be much more relaxed about not being in control. We need to learn to go with the flow and help one another along the way. We need to learn to trust the universe, as well as the people we share it with.

⁸⁸ **Niels Bohr** (1885, 1962) was a Danish physicist who made significant contributions to our understanding quantum mechanics. His most notable achievement was the Bohr model of the atom, proposed in 1913. When Bohr first published his findings, Albert Einstein called it "musicality in the sphere of thought. If all this is true, then it means the end of physics." <https://interestingengineering.com>

"All of which will mean we survive the climate crisis *and* get more out of life in the bargain."

"Yeah," said George. "You mentioned this already, when you said that people who look after other people end up feeling happier."

"Exactly!" affirmed D. "A powerful connection links acts of kindness with feeling happy. When we help someone else, our brain releases a little chemical reward for our good deed."

"Dopamine and endorphins." Faye nodded.

The Director nodded. "Those little 'feel-good' chemicals in our brains that reward us for doing good."

"So it *is* better to give than receive!" George said, now smiling and feeling more optimistic.

"And when we help each other and experience that happiness, it creates a positive feedback loop, meaning the more we give, the more likely we are to keep giving. What's more, kindness gives us a sense of purpose, lowers our stress levels, makes us less neurotic, and boosts our well-being in ways that no amount of cars, watches, or handbags ever could. And it's free! That's something capitalism can't compete with. Capitalism thrives on financial transactions, but it has no place in a world where people help each other just because they want to."

"Tell me about it, I pay my therapist a fortune to tell me I'm neurotic. So where do I sign up?"

"Hold on," said Faye, not wanting to rain on the Director's parade. I still have one last lingering concern."

"What's that?" The Director leaned in. "Let's see if I can help."

"Well, I more or less buy into your views on capitalism, and I certainly agree we need to find a different way, because the direction we're heading in is going to kill us. It's just that I'm afraid nothing I do will make much difference. Most of the time, I feel like I'm up against the whole world, that I'm just a bartender,

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and I need this job. If I follow your suggestion, I might lose this salary. And if I do that I won't graduate or pay back my student loan."

"I hear you." The Director's voice softened. We all feel vulnerable when challenging the status quo, especially when it threatens our livelihoods."

At that moment, George raised both hands in surprised enlightenment. "I get it!" he shouted, pointing at Faye. "You're the hummingbird!"

"I am?" Faye looked confused.

"Yes!" confirmed George. "When we were filming the scene in the movie where Alice is reading *The Brave Little Hummingbird*^{89/90} to Evie I looked it up on the internet so I could read it to niece on a Zoom call."

"Please explain," pleaded D, quietly satisfied that at least something had made an impression on George during filming.

"OK," began George. *"One day, a fire started in the rainforest. All the jungle animals began to panic and run from the flames. But, as they reached the river's edge, they saw a tiny hummingbird flying in the other direction.*

'Where are you going, little hummingbird?' asked the panther.

'I'm putting out the fire!' the hummingbird replied breathlessly, gathering two more drops of water in her tiny beak.

'Don't bother,' said the snake. 'There's nothing you can do. Your beak is so small, and the fire is so hot, you might get burned.'

The hummingbird didn't answer; she was too busy collecting water. She repeated this all afternoon until the monkey begged her to stop.

'Dear hummingbird, you are courageous but also very small, and your tiny beak cannot put out the fire alone. Why don't you stop?'

To which the hummingbird replied, 'Because I'm doing what I can.'

⁸⁹ **I will be a hummingbird** - Wangari Maathai (English) www.youtube.com

⁹⁰ **The Forest Fire and The Hummingbird** originates from the story told by **Wangari Maathai (1940, 2011)**, a Kenyan environmentalist and political activist. Maathai often shared this parable to convey the importance of taking action.. She was awarded the Nobel Prize: "for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace" www.nobelprize.org

"That's exactly what I'm talking about!" cheered D, pointing at George and patting him firmly on the shoulder. "And I'm saying that if we all do what we can, even if it doesn't seem like much on its own, collectively, we can make a real difference."

"Oooh! Oooh!" exclaimed Faye, as though she'd just remembered something, before spinning around to look under the bar.

George assumed that talking about rainforests had prompted her to make monkey noises.

Meanwhile, the Director continued his point. "Some people will think we're mad for trying to make a difference, but what's the alternative? Should we just give up and watch the planet burn? You might be willing to do that, but I'm certainly not giving up. I won't sugarcoat this, George, but we've all got to decide where we stand. We can continue to be part of the problem, or realise our only hope is to be part of the solution."

"Do I have to make that choice right now?" asked George, as he was having trouble staying awake.

Faye then returned, holding a scrap of paper and a calculator like a schoolgirl hoping to earn a house point. The Director paused to let her speak.

"On average, a hummingbird's beak holds seven millilitres of water," she said excitedly. "And there are about eight billion people on Earth."

"Go on." He was beginning to guess where she was heading.

"Well, let's assume there's a hummingbird for every person, which means eight billion hummingbirds."

"OK." George leaned in.

"That means eight billion hummingbirds would be able to carry the equivalent of 56 million litres of water per trip, and if each hummingbird made three trips a day, that would come to about 168 million litres, or, if you prefer, 67 Olympic-sized swimming pools!" concluded Faye, very pleased with herself, slapping both hands on the bar.

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"That'll soon put the fire out!" said George triumphantly.

"Quite so!" said D. "Especially if we do it day after day for the rest of our lives. You've made my point perfectly, Faye. Thank you."

"And that doesn't even include the jaguars, monkeys or snakes joining in!" said George, at which the sleepy old man and sassy young bartender smiled at each other, amused.

"But it doesn't work if none of us are willing to be the first hummingbird," D added, more seriously now.

"And that answers your question, George: Yes, you have to make your choice right now, because if you leave it until tomorrow, the forest will have burned down. But I do have some final thoughts that might give you hope."

"What are they?" asked George, seeking still more good news.

7.5. With a Little Help from My Friends

"Look, I understand your feelings of helplessness," said D sympathetically.

"Sometimes, I wake up at night and wonder whether I'm going mad, because everyone else seems to think capitalism is perfectly normal."

"I mean, we grow up believing our parents know what they're talking about when they say they want us to do well and get a good career. Then we go to school and assume our teachers must have the answers, or why else would they be standing at the front, telling us what to think? After that, we get a job and take it for granted that our bosses must be cleverer than we are, because they're more successful. Then we get home, turn on the television, and listen to politicians confidently string sentences together and we at least hope they know what they're talking about. After all, they're the ones driving the bus."

"So the world *seems* like a sensible place that has our best interests at heart, if we all just buckle down, work hard, and pay our taxes."

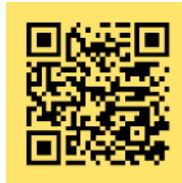
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