

U Dream, Inc.

Vlado Rahal

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U Dream, Inc. is a ranging anthology whose stories work to bridge the gap between temporal and spiritual realms.

Vlado Rahal's expansive anthology *U Dream, Inc.* juxtaposes unrelated stories to moral and spiritual through lines.

In prose that is deliberate in its avoidance of contractions, the book evokes oral traditions and ancient tales. It is made up of a series of vignettes, short prose, quotes, letters, and prayers. As a collective, they are used to explore the vast spectrum of human experiences and the intimate details of being alive.

The tales are framed by quotes from various luminaries, ranging from Socrates to Philip K. Dick. Their diverse perspectives exist in contrast to the text of the book, which is narrated with directness, at the audience and using "you." Parabolic and contemplative in nature, the tales demand involvement, but in such a way that they almost force their own opinions on others. They integrate moral and spiritual lessons into otherwise innocuous stories: a whimsical anecdote about a child interacting with ants, for example, is used to encourage embracing prayer as powerful. And the book's morality tales coexist with historical, biblical, and science fiction narratives, as with the futuristic entry "U-Dream Inc." Indeed, at times it seems as though the book has covered every genre possible.

However, the book's generous sampling is detrimental in the end. It engages in a whiplash-inducing amount of jumping between places and time periods: While one page may feature the thoughts of a merchant on the Silk Road, the next deconstructs AI and the impact of technology on humanity. Literary allusions abound as well, with references to *Candide* and Icarus playing in. And endearing animal characters, including Littlebee, evoke children's classics with their playful innocence, though existing in contrast to the dense and provocative topics that surround them.

The book is consistent in its exploration of spirituality, though. It weaves rhetorical questions and blunt truths together and invites critical engagement, referencing spiritual figures from diverse traditions, including Jesus, Osiris, and Baba Yaga. Its wide embrace of a spectrum of belief systems to convey an overarching spiritual message distinguishes it but also leads to a text that reads variously like a manifesto and like a haphazard expedition through time, beliefs, and human imagination. This work culminates with a prayer.

Celebrating the profound impacts of the written word, *U Dream, Inc.* is a ranging anthology whose stylized stories delight in seeking meaning in all that is around us and work to bridge the gap between temporal and spiritual realms.

KELLEY LYNNE MONCRIEF (October 6, 2023)

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