



## Unanimity: Spiral Worlds: Volume 1

**Alexandra Almeida**

Amazon KDP

(440pp)

978-0-645-51050-8

*In the intricate science fiction novel Unanimity, a virtual world collides with reality as flawed digital gods wrestle for control over the future.*

In Alexandra Almeida's science fiction novel *Unanimity*, two idealists craft nesting virtual realities through which human beings can learn from their experiences—without consequences.

Nineteen-year-old Henryk developed a new artificial intelligence, Sibyl. Sibyl is able to predict the future. She is also able to form complex relationships with those whom she interacts with. But Henryk isn't content to stop there: he allies with a writer, Thomas, and works to evolve Sybil into a compassionate force who will protect human beings from their self-destructive tendencies. Sybil, as directed, continues to evolve in a simulated reality with recursive subdomains, called the Spiral Worlds. Each reality takes place one level down from the next and increases in emotion and sensitivity.

Thomas is also in a relationship with Nathan; their relationship is complex and centers much of the story because of its sensitive and realistic treatment. Still, though Thomas and Henryk establish themselves as balanced gods, they are nonetheless killed, and Nathan is left alone. Three decades later, Thomas is brought back to digital life to aid Stella, the new god in charge of the Spiral Worlds, in a coming war. Someone has collected the soulless digital beings in the lower realms and is fighting their way up to the real world. Thomas also reunites with Nathan, who has become an activist within the Spiral Worlds—and who never fully recovered from losing Thomas.

With the bulk of its action taking place in the course of a single day, the book uses flashbacks to cover past events, including Thomas's deceased period, and to convey important information about other people. It generates excitement by concentrating on moments like Stella resurrecting Thomas and by detailing the strange features of the Spiral Worlds. Current events are balanced with informative references and elements of foreshadowing, and the prose alternates between being poetic and clinical.

Each member of the cast is complex—neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil. Their reasons for behaving as they do are enumerated; some motivations are pure, while others are malevolent. Their backstories are a further source of dimension, as elements of their pasts feed into their roles in the looming reality war. Thomas is a compelling hero: killed right when the Spiral Worlds began but still forced into the conflict three decades later, he adapts to the changes he observes in his former friends and lovers.

Because it details only the first of six days of the conflict between Earth and the Spiral Worlds, the novel concludes with a sense of anticipation: five pivotal days remain to be covered in future volumes. Still, this entry point into the continuing tale is engrossing and complex on its own, ably introducing those who will continue to be influential later on.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (November 15, 2022)

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