

# From Allegory to Algorithm: Digital Dystopia and Humanitarian Resistance in 1Q84

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## Abstract:

Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* is a sprawling and enigmatic novel often read as a modern allegory for totalitarianism. However, this study argues that the novel's dystopia, while drawing on historical precedents, is fundamentally a product of the nascent digital age. This study analyzes how Murakami's "Little People" function not only as allegorical figures of state control but also as an algorithmic force, manipulating reality, personal histories, and consciousness through a process of data-driven, non-human logic. The protagonists, Aomame and Tengo, are not simply rebels against a tyrannical regime; their resistance is a form of humanitarian defiance against this algorithmic dystopia. This analysis explores their individual acts of resistance—Aomame's physical intervention and Tengo's literary creation—as a reassertion of human agency, empathy, and the tangible reality of the body and emotion against the abstract, sterile, and all-encompassing control of the Little People. The paper concludes that *1Q84* offers a prescient critique of a dystopian future where control is not exerted through brute force but through the seamless integration of a rewritten reality, challenging us to consider what it means to be human in an increasingly algorithmically defined world.

**Keywords:** Murakami Haruki, 1Q84, Dystopian Literature, Digital Dystopia, Algorithmic Control, Surveillance Capitalism, Humanitarian Resistance

## Introduction

Dystopian narratives have long served as cautionary tales about power, control, and the erosion of human freedom. George Orwell's *1984* famously portrayed a brutal totalitarian state where surveillance and propaganda subjugated individual thought. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* warns of a society lulled into compliance through pleasure and distraction. However, in the digital twenty-first century, these paradigms are being redefined and reinterpreted. Control is no longer maintained solely through state coercion or through ideological manipulation. Increasingly, it is exerted through algorithmic processes—opaque automated systems that reshape perceptions, behaviors, and identities through data. In this context, Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* presents a distinctly modern dystopia that resonates with contemporary anxieties.

While *1Q84* incorporates elements of the fantastical and metaphysical, its underlying mechanisms of power are rooted in a form of control that mirrors the algorithmic influence. The novel's "Little People"—obscure, untraceable beings who manipulate events and rewrite reality—are not simply supernatural villains. Rather, they reflect the impersonal logic of digital systems that shape lived

experiences without conscious awareness of the same. This paper argues that 1Q84 critiques an emergent form of algorithmic dystopia in which reality is not enforced through violence but rewritten through data and predictive logic. In doing so, the novel redefines this resistance. The protagonists, Aomame and Tengo, oppose this control not through rebellion but through deeply human acts—embodied actions, emotional connections, and narrative creation. Their stories offer a vision of humanitarian resistance in a world that is increasingly defined by nonhuman systems.

### **The Algorithmic Dystopia: From Orwell to Murakami**

To understand 1Q84's unique dystopia, it is essential to trace the evolution of control in literature and society. Orwell's 1984 depicts a world of overt totalitarianism in which surveillance, censorship, and state violence maintain order. The power was operated vertically and was visible. In contrast, contemporary societies are increasingly governed by automated, decentralized, and inscrutable algorithmic systems. These systems are not concerned with obedience per se but with prediction and optimization of the results.

Murakami's dystopia reflects this societal shift in several ways. The world of 1Q84 is not overtly authoritarian. There are no cameras watching citizens or ministries rewriting the newspapers. Instead, the structure of reality has been subtly changed. Time diverges. A second moon appears. In the novel, characters are displaced from one version of reality to another without warning or explanation. As Tengo reflects, "The world had already changed, but the changes had not yet reached his senses" (Murakami 87). This mirrors how algorithmic infrastructures—social media, search engines, and recommender systems—reshape our informational environment without direct confrontation or engagement with the user. We are not forced to believe something false; rather, we are surrounded by a new version of the truth, curated to our predicted behavior.

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's concept of a "society of control" captures this shift in the following manner. Unlike Foucault's disciplinary societies, where power is enacted through institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals), Deleuze foresaw a world in which control is continuous, subtle, and encoded in systems. In this model, individuals are "dividuals"—data profiles shaped and constrained by feedback loops (Deleuze 4). Murakami's narrative, with its seamless blend of parallel worlds, secret cults, and omnipresent yet intangible forces, allegorizes this shift. The Little People are not tyrants; they are the system processes. They do not coerce; they configure the world.

### **The Little People as Algorithmic Agents**

The Little People are among the most enigmatic entities in Murakami's fiction. They operate outside conventional morality and political allegiances. They do not issue threats or seek obedience. Instead, they alter reality at its foundation—shifting timelines, inserting entities (such as faceless maza and dohta), and orchestrating events in ways that mirror the algorithmic outputs.

Their behavior suggests an operational logic similar to that of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. They are self-correcting, reactive, and appear autonomous. When Tengo rewrites Air Chrysalis, the Little People retaliate by attempting to erase him—not through physical attack but by disrupting the trajectory of his life's narrative. This resonates with the idea of algorithmic retaliation in real life: recommendation

engines that punish deviation, social media platforms that suppress visibility, or credit systems that penalize anomalous behavior (Zuboff 234–36).

Their most chilling attribute is their opacity. Similar to black-box AI systems, Little People function according to rules that characters cannot understand. This engenders a form of existential paranoia: if reality itself can be altered by forces that do not reason like humans, what grounds remain for truth or agency?

Literary theorist N. Katherine Hayles discusses how the posthuman condition involves a “distributed cognition”—a model where agency is no longer centered in individual minds, but shared across systems, environments, and machines (Hayles 288). In 1Q84, the Little People represent this distributed and inhuman logic of the system. Their actions are procedural rather than personal. They function less like antagonists and more like processes that have gone rogue—logical, consistent, and entirely indifferent to human suffering.

### **Aomame and Embodied Resistance**

Aomame, a trained assassin specializing in eliminating powerful abusers, stands in sharp contrast to the ethereal manipulations of Little People. Her resistance is physical, intentional, and deeply rooted in a concrete world. She chooses to act with her body—to take life, protect it, and shelter herself in hidden spaces. In doing so, she reasserts the primacy of the human body as a site of knowledge, experience, and resistance.

Her method of assassination—precise, intimate, and bodily—rejects the distance and abstraction of algorithmic violence. Unlike the invisible hand of the Little People, who alter lives without leaving a trace, Aomame confronts her targets directly. Her use of touch and proximity reclaims the body as a weapon and a sanctuary (Iles 74–76).

Furthermore, Aomame's resistance is rooted in empathy. She kills not for profit but to avenge the women brutalized by patriarchal power. Her motivations cannot be predicted or quantified; they emerge from a moral compass embedded in emotion. This unpredictability is precisely what algorithmic logic suppresses. Aomame is not a node in a system; she is an agent who is irreducibly complex and emotionally driven.

Her journey also involved intense self-reflections. Trapped in the alternate 1Q84 reality, she questions the authenticity of her world. This meta-awareness of knowing that one may be living in a simulation echoes modern concerns about digital disconnection, simulation theory, and epistemological collapse in the age of AI. Aomame's resistance is not merely physical; it is existential.

### **Tengo and Narrative Reclamation**

Tengo's story intersects with the themes of authorship, its ethical implications, and narrative construction of reality. As a writer and editor, he is recruited to rewrite *Air Chrysalis*, a strange manuscript written by the mysterious Fuka-Eri. Initially, Tengo approaches the project as a literary exercise. However, as the

story bleeds into his reality—coinciding with the appearance of the second moon and the activation of the Little People—it becomes clear that rewriting the text is equivalent to...

Murakami suggests that stories are not representations of reality but engines that generate it. This metafictional insight parallels how algorithmic systems construct and reinforce reality through selection, repetition, and personalization. When an algorithm curates a news feed or search results, it does not simply reflect the world; it shapes it (Zuboff 319).

As Tengo realizes this, he begins to reclaim narrative control. He moves from passive editor to active creator, using writing as a tool to reconnect with Aomame and assert a more compassionate, coherent world. In contrast to the algorithmic generation of content—disembodied, statistical, indifferent—his writing is personal, emotional, and morally driven.

### **Empathy, Emotion, and the Human**

Ultimately, Murakami's vision is not nihilistic. The novel's conclusion—ambiguous but hopeful—suggests that human qualities can survive even in the most abstracted and digitized forms of oppression. When Aomame and Tengo finally reunite, they hold hands under the two moons. The scene is surreal, yet deeply emotional and grounded in physical presence and mutual recognition.

Murakami offers a counterpoint to algorithmic control: empathy. Algorithms may predict behavior, but they cannot replicate the compassion of a human being. They can manipulate preferences but cannot generate meaning or understanding. In 1Q84, love is not a weakness; it is a counter-system. It is unpredictable, unproductive, and resistant to treatment.

The final chapters argue that even in a world rewritten by nonhuman forces, there remains a space for the human. Aomame and Tengo do not escape the system. They endure it together, being aware and emotionally present. This endurance is the novel's final argument: resistance lies not in destruction but in being human.

### **Conclusion**

1Q84 transforms the dystopian genre by replacing overt authoritarianism with a subtler and more insidious form of control: algorithmic, ambient, and ontological. Through the figure of the Little People, Murakami allegorizes the rise of systems that govern without being in power and control without coercion. These systems do not crush dissent; rather, they rewrite the conditions under which dissent is possible.

In this environment, Aomame and Tengo become not rebels but restorers of humanity. Their resistance is not grandiose but deeply meaningful: Aomame's embodied interventions and Tengo's narrative creation both reclaim agency, emotion, and connection in a world designed to eliminate such qualities.

1Q84 thus stands as a prescient warning about the future of control and a poignant affirmation of what it means to remain human in the face of nonhuman systems. In a world increasingly defined by data and code, Murakami's novel insists that our greatest strength lies in the irrational, empathetic, and beautifully fragile human spirit.

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