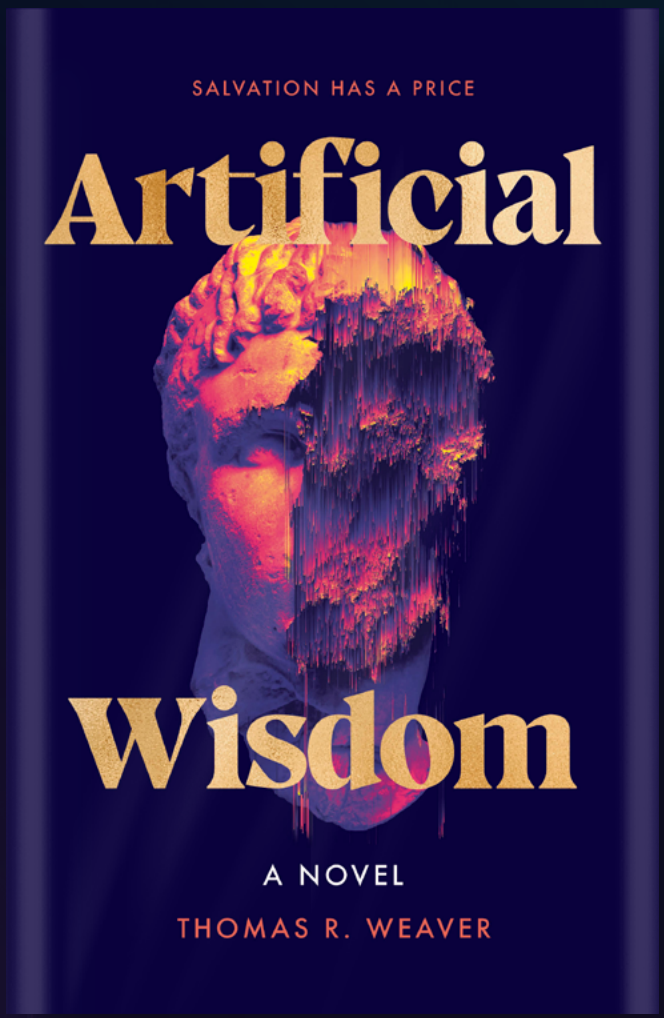
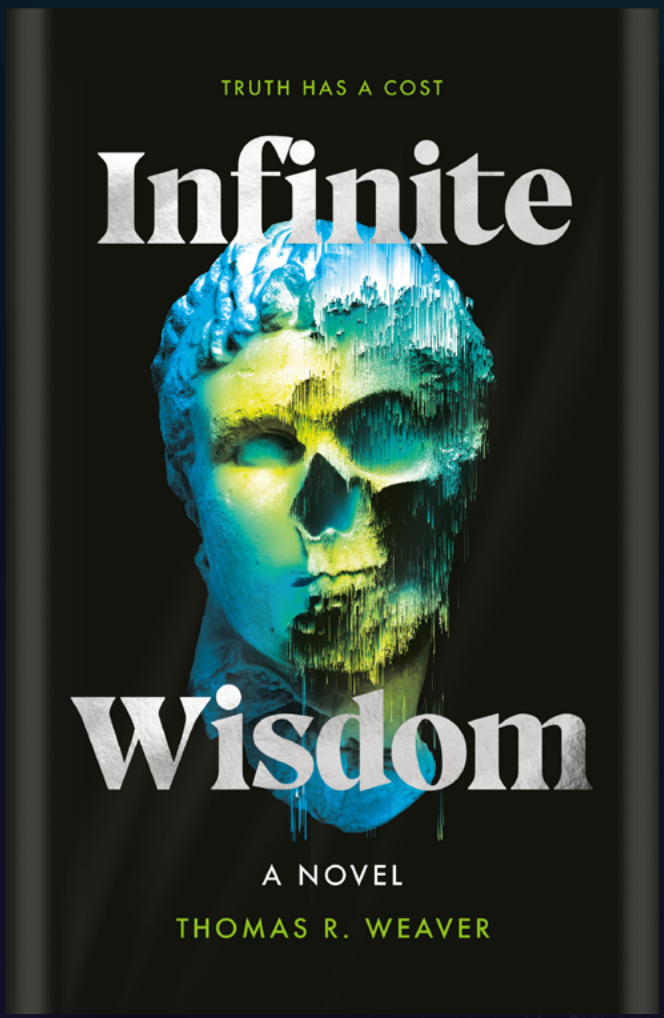
The Age of Wisdom Duology

BOOKCLUB KIT





THOMAS R. WEAVER

A Q&A with Thomas R. Weaver,

AUTHOR OF ***ARTIFICIAL WISDOM*** AND ***INFINITE WISDOM***

Q: How has your experience as a tech entrepreneur shaped your writing? Are there any Easter eggs included in either book from your time studying computer science?

A: Oh, definitely. I had a lot of fun. There's a reference to a law firm, "Turing & Turing," in *Artificial Wisdom* named after Alan Turing, creator of the Turing test to assess whether a machine can fool you into thinking it is intelligent. We also refer to a shadowy conspiracy group called "The League of Babbage," named after Charles Babbage, inventor of the first mechanical computer. There's a flight that disappears without explanation, numbered NC404, 404 being the internet code for Not Found. My favourite Easter egg though is the name of Dr. Martha C. Chandra, the genius who created the AI "Solomon." She shares a surname with Dr. Chandra, the scientist who built HAL 9000, from Arthur C. Clarke's *2010: Odyssey Two*. And Martha C. is a playful feminized twist on Arthur C.'s own name.

Q: The opening of *Artificial Wisdom* begins from the perspective of a pregnant woman. What made you choose to start the story there?

A: It was actually quite a late addition, but I wanted to immediately set the tone: a catastrophe that was also very personal. It's extremely short. I wanted to leave the reader wondering, *What just happened? Who is this woman, and what just happened to her?* You see it very tightly from her perspective. Then later, you get a feel for the true scale of the disaster, and you realize this was a story that hundreds of millions of people experienced.

Q: While both *Artificial Wisdom* and *Infinite Wisdom* explore a harrowing, eco-ravaged world, you keep hope central to the storyline. What do you want readers to take away from this message when they finish the duology?

A: Certainly hope. I don't see hope as naive optimism that everything will be fine, or abdication of duty in the "hope and prayers" sense. But I do see it as a critical part of being human that carries us through challenging times. I also want readers to take away the idea that we have the capability to do far more than we currently imagine, if we're willing to look the problem in the eye instead of looking away. I've always thought our species is remarkably good at burying its head in the sand until the options left on the table are worse than if we'd just confronted things when they first emerged. The duology is set in a world where people waited too long to have good options left, but (at least) are now finally doing something.

Q: Are there any movies, shows, or books that inspired you to want to write your own sci-fi thriller?

A: Given that the book is so cross-genre, there were a lot of influences I absorbed that weren't "sci-fi thrillers," per se. An Agatha Christie-style murder, for example, or the mystery-wrapped-in-a-thriller structure of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. I was a big fan of the sci-fi police procedural mystery series *Fringe*, but also of series like *The West Wing*. And as a kid, I was a huge fan of the *Back to the Future* trilogy, so perhaps it was natural I wanted to see what my version of the future could look like.

Q: One of the most interesting technologies in the Age of Wisdom duology is the egospace. Tully's egospace is a representation of the love for his wife and the pain of losing her. What would your egospace look like?

A: In the novels, an egospace is a full-sensory, virtual environment that you enter when using Neuro Reality, before you go off to meet others. It's a home space you can customize however you choose, completely private to you. I once queried my readers on what they'd choose, and nearly all of them said a personal library with a fireplace, bookshelves with a ladder, coffee, leather chairs—that kind of thing. I totally get that, but I like the idea of impossible spaces. We're in the brain after all, and don't need to obey reality. I want spaces that go far into imagination, into the future, into the past, into alternative realities. I want to be able to sit and contemplate a vast alien temple with soaring statues, and colors you've never seen before. Or a space like the balcony of a cyberpunk city with floating monorails and strange craft in the skies. Or the glass lobby of a space hotel hovering over a beautiful planetary scene. I want spaces that take me places I can't go today! I've no idea what that says about me.

Q: From mass protests to deadly heatwaves, the events in *Artificial Wisdom* and *Infinite Wisdom* mirror many of the current events breaking news today, despite the books being set in 2050 and 2055. When you set out to write both books, did you have any personal rules for including real-life events? Have you been surprised by any of the similarities between the books and reality?

A: I wanted to create a vision of the future that felt authentic and realistic, so I based both the technology vision and the worldbuilding on trends I could see in the data, and then projected forward. For example, it was clear to me that wet-bulb, high-humidity heatwaves had already occurred, were most likely to occur in a handful of regions in the world, and were not only likely to get worse, but would be one of the types of disasters that killed the most people over a large geographical area. So, I picked that. Now, whenever there are high-humidity heatwaves or any kind of terrifying AI news, people send it me and ask how I was so prescient. But it's just extrapolation from current events, really.

Q: Coffee, real and virtual, is a beloved beverage in the Age of Wisdom duology. Do you share your characters' love of coffee? What's your go-to coffee order?

A: Well, I really do love coffee, so my character Livia is showing a little bit of me, there. But I also thought it had some really interesting characteristics that fit within the theme of the book. First, it's something we take for granted that is under threat in a worsening climate. We may have to rely on synthetic coffee in the future, like in *Infinite Wisdom*. Second, as Michael Pollan brilliantly outlines in *This Is Your Mind on Plants,* coffee dramatically changed British society in a very short space of time. It arrived in the UK in the 1650s alongside the other key source of caffeine (tea), and created an explosion in productivity in a populace where it had previously only really been safe to drink beer (not water!). Now, people could drink something safe that stimulated the mind instead of slowed it. Our minds became dependent on caffeine, and Pollan argues that in some ways coffee and tea domesticated *us* into spreading them and ensuring their survival. And I can't help but see parallels with AI right now. It is causing a productivity explosion, particularly in the coding space. I suspect in twenty years we'll be asking the same question about who domesticated whom: us, or the technology we built to serve us?

Q: The science-fiction genre often explores themes of fate vs. free will, the morality of cloning, the loss of individuality, and so much more. What theme was most important for you to explore while writing the Age of Wisdom duology?

A: If I had to pick one, it'd be manipulation: how easily what we believe to be true can be shaped by forces we never see. That started for me, for example, with Brexit: watching how cheaply public opinion could be moved with relatively blunt tools like bot farms, and then wondering what happens when that capability gets dramatically more sophisticated. The duology is really an extrapolation of that worry: what does persuasion (for better or worse!) look like when the thing doing the persuading is smarter than you, patient enough to play a long game, and never needs to sleep?

But I was careful not to make it a good-versus-evil story about manipulation. Propaganda has been used for good as well as evil. We just call the good version "a public health campaign." I wanted readers to sit in that discomfort rather than hand them a villain to blame it all on. Fate versus free will shows up here too, just reframed: if your beliefs can be engineered, how free is the choice you think you're making? I don't prescribe an answer. I'd rather leave people arguing about it than tell them what to think, which would be a little hypocritical, given the subject matter.

Q: Readers can't help but root for Tully and October's love story woven throughout both books. Did you always know you wanted Tully to find love again or did the characters lead you there on their own?

A: I always knew. I didn't want it to be quick or easy for him, given that when we meet Tully he is still severely grieving his wife. But that's also a story of healing, just one that's more personal than healing the planet.

Q: Finally: would you vote to Upgrade or Unplug?

A: Tough question! *Upgrade* is the idea that humanity could become more and transcend the self-destructive flaws we have. *Unplug* sends us to a pre-tech age and forces us to slow down. I love the romance of *Unplug* but I think it would be hard and messy. I think we'd have to *Upgrade*, but I do think there are other ways of upgrading our minds at least. Forget Artificial or Infinite Wisdom, there's plenty of ancient wisdom out there we'd do well to tap into, such as meditation and breathwork.

Upgrade or Unplug Cocktail

YIELDS: 1 PITCHER



INGREDIENTS

4 bags of butterfly pea flower tea
4 ounces vodka
2 cups water
6 lemons
1 cup granulated sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

TO MAKE THE ICE CUBES:

Boil one cup of water and steep 4 bags of butterfly pea flower tea for 3–4 minutes, until water is deep blue. Pour tea into an ice cube tray and freeze for at least four hours.

TO MAKE THE SIMPLE SYRUP:

Add one cup of water and one cup of granulated sugar to a pot and turn the heat to medium. Whisk together until the sugar is completely melted and the liquid is clear, then remove from heat.

TO MAKE THE COCKTAIL:

1. Wash, cut, and juice the lemons (about 1½ cups of juice).
2. Combine the juice, 4 ounces of vodka, and half of the cooled syrup in a pitcher. Adjust for taste, adding more syrup or water to your liking. Place in fridge to chill.
3. When ready to serve, put the ice cubes in a bowl with a spoon or tongs and pour the cocktail into glasses. To "upgrade" your drink, place the ice cube in the glass and watch the cocktail turn from blue to purple!

Mission Decode

Help Tully's team decode these important book quotes from *Artificial Wisdom* and *Infinite Wisdom*.

1.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
														2	3		21			12					

U P R O R U P U

12 3 18 21 14 6 5 2 21 12 20 3 13 12 18

2.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
21			22	10	19			5				8	15	4				11							

N O F A E M I N D S I N O U U E A D S

15 4 19 21 7 10 8 5 15 22 11 5 15 4 26 17 18 10 21 22 11

3.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
5		22		15			12							2			6	23	24						

H O E A S T H E O E S T C R E

12 2 13 15 25 5 23 24 12 15 2 1 16 15 23 24 22 14 6 15

4.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
							16	3			10		15				14		17				20	4	

T H T R T H I N T L X R Y

17 16 7 17 14 21 17 16 3 26 15 23 17 19 10 21 20 21 14 4

5.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
		14		23	5		8						16					3	11	20					

F U N N T H N C H C E S T H E

5 20 16 16 21 11 8 10 16 15 14 8 22 10 14 23 3 11 8 23 21

N E E T E U T H E C E

16 23 12 23 25 11 23 13 13 21 22 20 11 8 23 19 25 10 14 23

U F N T

20 19 5 25 22 16 11

ANSWERS

1. "Upgrade or unplug." 2. "NO FAKE MINDS IN OUR HEADS." 3. "Hope was the oldest cure." 4. "The truth is not a luxury." 5. "Funny thing, choices. They never tell you the price up front."

The Artificial Wisdom Duology

PLAYLIST

Listen to playlists inspired by the novels on **Spotify** or using the tracks below.

WAKE UP – Young the Giant

HELP I'M ALIVE – Metric

STARLIGHT – Muse

SOUNDS FAMILIAR (French Version) – Owlle

SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN – Young the Giant

UNBELIEVERS – Vampire Weekend

R U MINE? – Arctic Monkeys

MOVE – Saint Motel

BLISTER IN THE SUN – Violent Femmes

SYMPATHY MAGIC – Florence + The Machine

UNKNOWN / NTH – Hozier

LIES – Glen Hansard

HURRICANE – MS MR

HEAVY CROSS – Gossip

COSMIC LOVE – Florence + The Machine

AMERICAN REQUIEM – Beyoncé

TO SOMEONE FROM A WARM CLIMATE (Uiscefhuaraithe) – Hozier

DIY Phone Brick

Unplug from your screen and plug into a good book using your favorite bookmark.

WHAT YOU NEED

NFC tag device
A bookmark
App blocker

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Download an app blocker of your choice. The Foqos app works well for Apple and the Switchly app for Android. Both are free!
2. Once the app blocker is downloaded, choose what apps you are interested in blocking.
3. Choose a blocking strategy! For this, we suggest choosing to block manually from your phone, and unblock using the NFC tag.
4. Choose your NFC tag. This can be a cheap NFC tag sticker from Amazon, or even a barcode cut from a cereal box.
5. In the app of your choice, make sure you set only that tag as the item to scan. That way, no other item can be used to unlock the apps.
6. Attach the NFC tag sticker or barcode to a bookmark. When you are ready to unplug and read, manually block your apps and then place the bookmark on your fridge or another place that's not easy to reach. When you are done, simply tap the bookmark, and slide it back into your book!