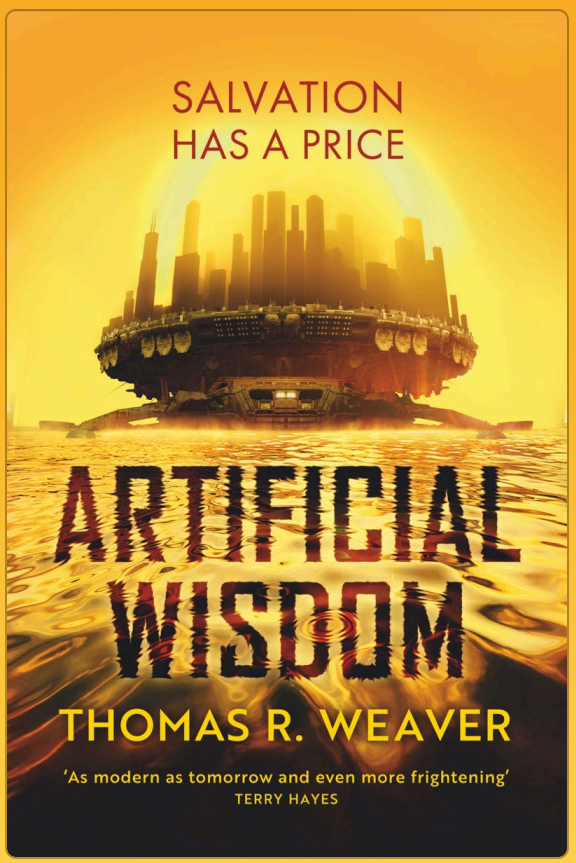
READING GROUP GUIDE




# ARTIFICIAL WISDOM

## THOMAS R. WEAVER

SELECTED FOR THE BBC RADIO 2 BOOK CLUB

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

# DEAR READER

I didn't set out to write a thriller about artificial intelligence, global politics or the climate crisis, but I did want to craft a page-turner full of mystery, twists and questions. The kind of thing that might keep you thinking well beyond the last page. I've always been inspired by movies like Blade Runner and Inception that make you think and debate big themes, and don't give clean answers about what really happened.

Artificial Wisdom is a near-future thriller wrapped around a murder mystery, but at its core, it's about a choice. If the only way to survive means giving up some, or even all, of our freedom... would we take it? And if an AI could truly save us—should we let it?

I hope Artificial Wisdom makes you think. But mostly, I hope it keeps you turning the pages late into the night. I hope it leaves your mind whirling, and your club debating long after the meeting should have ended.

*To the future,*

*Thomas R. Weaver*

## ABOUT THE BOOK

2050: the planet is burning and drowning, and the nations of the world vote to elect a single global leader to steer humanity through the climate apocalypse. The final two candidates—a former U.S. president, and Solomon, the first artificial intellect to hold political office. But as Election Day races closer, Solomon's creator is murdered, and investigative journalist Marcus Tully must unravel a conspiracy that will either upend the world or save it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS · SPOILER-FREE

# QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CLUB

Safe to discuss at any point. Spoiler questions are on the sealed “After the Last Page” sheet.

## TRUTH AND THE JOURNALIST

1. Marcus Tully is an idealistic journalist, determined to uncover the truth no matter the consequences. Is he right? Or are there times when the consequences of the truth are too great?

2. Tully investigates a story bound up with the death of his wife. Is a personal stake a liability or an asset for a journalist?

3. Tully’s story begins with a whistleblower’s tip. What responsibility do whistleblowers and journalists carry for the impact of what they reveal? Should they reveal everything, at any cost?

4. What makes conspiracy theories so appealing to some people? How could misinformation and fringe ideas shape politics by 2050?

## POWER AND THE ELECTION

5. The nations of the world elect one leader with sweeping powers to fight the climate crisis. Is concentrating that much power in one leader too dangerous, even if they are democratically elected? Or is bold, decisive leadership exactly what an existential threat demands?

6. How do you feel about an artificial intelligence running for political office? What benefits and risks do you see?

7. Why do you think the author chose Lockwood and Solomon as the final two candidates? Think about nationality, the country Solomon was built in, age and background.

8. Tully’s confrontation with Lockwood raises a past scandal about geo-engineering. Should leaders be held accountable for the unintended consequences of decisions they made for what they believed was the greater good?

## THE WORLD OF 2050

9 Did you find the world of Artificial Wisdom plausible? How close to our own reality does it feel?

10 The Floating States are mini utopias, but only for the few. Who should be allowed to live on one, and who decides who is worthy? Given the chance, would you go, or stay in the world outside?

11 Tully and October disagree about using Neuro-Reality technology in interrogations. Where do you stand? What safeguards should exist for tools that powerful?

12 In 2050, social media requires a link to a real-world ID. Does social media work best when people are anonymous, or when they use their real names?

13 From cleaning bots and self-driving taxis to virtual travel and perfume in a pill, the novel is full of near-future technology. Which would you welcome, and which turned you cold? Could virtual travel ever replace the real thing?

## THE BOOK AND YOU

14 The prologue is very short and very personal. How did it make you feel, and what tone did it set for the rest of the book?

15 Did the book change your opinion about anything, or teach you something new?

16 What could we do now to prevent a 2050 like the one in the book?

17 Who would you recommend this book to, and why?

READING TOGETHER

# THE FOUR-WEEK READALONG

Each week's questions cover only those chapters. Chapter numbers follow the Penguin Random House editions.

## WEEK 1

CHAPTERS 1–17

A whistleblower, a heat-struck London and a trip to New Carthage.

The book opens in a London plagued by dust, heat and floods. Does cli-fi inspire you or scare you? Have you read any others?

Tully's journey begins with a whistleblower's tip, but the deeper he digs, the murkier the truth becomes. Should a journalist reveal everything, at any cost?

Tully and Livia take a self-driving taxi. Robotaxis already run in some cities today. Would you ride in one?

Artificial Wisdom is set in 2050. What is one thing you hope will have been invented by then?

## WEEK 2

CHAPTERS 18–35

The race tightens, and the story turns into a murder mystery.

Solomon says he wants the best for all of humanity. Lockwood says he represents humanity. Who would you vote for today, and why?

This has turned into a murder mystery. Who is on your list of suspects?

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon controls people through the feeling that someone is always watching. Solomon can be in many places at once, yet Martha designed her security system as a blind spot. What does it mean that she gave him a place not to look? Does it change how much you trust him?

## WEEK 3

CHAPTERS 36–52

Perfume in a pill, life on the water and a widening conspiracy.

Jiang creates pills that let your body sweat a natural perfume. What scent would match your personality?

Haymaker and Tully dislike the floating city-states; Livia is in awe of them. If they were real, would you want to live on one?

## WEEK 4

CHAPTER 53 TO THE END

Finish together, then open the sealed questions.

The questions for the final week give away the ending. Open the sealed "After the last page" sheet only when everyone has finished.

THE AUTHOR

# ABOUT THOMAS R. WEAVER

Thomas R. Weaver writes stories about tomorrow to help make sense of today.

His debut novel, Artificial Wisdom, was selected for the BBC Radio 2 Book Club and published internationally by Penguin Random House. It has been translated into German, Vietnamese and French. The sequel, Infinite Wisdom, is published in November 2026.

Before writing fiction, Thomas spent two decades in tech: building, scaling and selling a startup to Just Eat Takeaway, and thinking about where technology is headed. He studied computer science, which is where the book's Easter eggs come from. He lives just outside London.

## MORE FOR YOUR CLUB

### THE 2050 BALLOT

Four cut-out ballots. Vote at the first meeting, and again at the last.

### THE NEW CARTHAGE PRESS PACK

Eight documents from 2050 to put on the table: news, adverts, a candidate sheet.

### EASTER EGG HUNT

Four hidden tributes to computing history. Answers on page two.

### HOST KIT

A themed menu, the writing playlist and six icebreakers.

## REGISTER YOUR CLUB

Tell Tom you are reading. Send your ballot count, ask a question, or request signed bookplates and a video visit at **thomasrweaver.com/book-clubs**.

GLOBAL PROTECTORSHIP · OFFICIAL BALLOT

# VOTE 2050

GLOBAL POPULAR VOTE · 18 AUGUST 2050

Mark one box only. Your vote is secret.

☐ **LAWRENCE G. LOCKWOOD**

Former President of the United States · Nominated by Japan · "Humanity in human hands"

☐ **GOVERNOR SOLOMON**

Artificial intellect · Governor of the Floating States · Nominated by Sweden

Voter _____

☐ First meeting ☐ After the last page

ATHENS CONVENTION

SEND YOUR CLUB'S COUNT TO THOMASRWEAVER.COM/BOOK-CLUBS

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The Daily Time

MONDAY, JULY 2ND, 2040 LATE EDITION WORLD

UNPRECEDENTED WET-BULB CATASTROPHE SENDS THE ENTIRE REGION DARK

# Millions Dead in Gulf Heatwave

BAGHDAD – Across a wide swath of the Middle East, scorching temperatures were already damaging harvests and causing heat stroke and brown-outs. Overnight, everything changed when the wet-bulb temperature rose from 86°F to 118°F, twenty-three degrees past the threshold of human survivability.

Compounding the danger, energy blackouts spread throughout the region as hundreds of millions sought refuge in the safety of air-con, overwhelming grids and sending people back out into the streets to find shade wherever they could.

Today, hundreds of millions are feared dead across the region, in a disaster that has seemingly decapitated national and regional governments across the Middle East, leaving a power vacuum some experts claim will be exploited by decentralised fundamentalists.

US President Lawrence G. Lockwood issued a short statement on Minds, saying, "I'm holding the entire region in my hopes and prayers."

According to sources at the White House, Lockwood convened the joint chiefs in the situation room for much of the day, ultimately deciding against an aid package, with no obvious governing bodies to agree humanitarian relief with and a concern it could be seen as invasion in an area already knocked to its knees.

Meteorologist Dr Kami Gujrathi told The Daily Time the rise had been unexpected and was so far unexplained. "This is something of a freak event."

"The word 'unprecedented' has already been used a lot today, after several decades filled with that word," said Dr Gujrathi. "My colleagues are starting to call this the tabkhir, from the Arabic for 'steaming'. That's what has happened here. People think of heatwaves as dry, hot heat, but in this case, it was the water that killed people."

EDITORIAL P17: CATASTROPHE WILL INCREASE CALLS FOR CLIMATE PROTECTORSHIP

PROFILE

# THE MAN WHO WON'T LET IT BURN

ELODIE KERN · FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE COLUMBIA REVIEW, NOV 2049

Marcus Tully doesn't like being called brave.

He'll wince a little if you say it, then wave it away with some remark about "just doing the job." But ask anyone who works with him—at his office-slash-apartment hybrid on Pudding Lane—and you'll get variations on the same theme: Tully doesn't blink. Not when the stories get dangerous. Not when they get personal. Not even when his own name starts trending, usually for the wrong reasons.

"I'm not trying to be followed," he said in a live interview on Minds earlier this year. "My readers don't follow me. They follow the work."

The work, for Tully, has lately included the fall of French finance minister Gabriel Dupont, the exposure of a Neuro-Reality brothel used for coercing political candidates, and a forensic report that linked a climate lobbyist's yacht party to the mysterious vanishing of a river-cleaning contract in Uganda. His newsroom is small, funded entirely by microtransactions and subscriber tips on Minds. His team sleeps in the same building they work from.

"It's not glamorous," says Lottie Shock, his subeditor. "It's not exactly comfortable. But it's righteous. Marcus makes sure of that."

> *"He doesn't care about being first. He cares about being right."*

He doesn't have security. He doesn't have legal cover, beyond what his partner Juan Bolivar can conjure from two decades of legal footwork and a bottle of decent rum. What he does have is reach. His exposé on the Louvre corruption scheme cracked two hundred million views in its first six hours. A week later, his report on modern climate refugee slavery put him on the cover of the South China Review. He refused to sit for the portrait.

"He's what we all wanted to be when we were idealistic twenty-somethings," says Fahrenthold Jr. "Except he's still doing it."

Ask Tully about his process and you'll get something simple. "Grunt work," he said. "Like a copper walking the beat. Everything's out there, if you're patient. If you look twice."

"He doesn't care about being first," says Randall Morrow, his tech lead. "He cares about being right."

With the Global Protectorship race heating up, and Solomon now a viable candidate, Tully's name has been mentioned as "someone who'll get the real story, when it breaks." He's been quiet on Solomon so far. Too quiet, perhaps.

"He's watching," says Bolivar. "He always watches."

WIRE · ATHENS

# Global Election Narrows to Two: Lockwood vs. Solomon

ATHENS, JULY 1, 2050 · COMPILED FROM WIRE REPORTS

The race for global protector—the position granted sweeping powers to combat the climate crisis—narrowed unexpectedly today as Amare Abara, former UN Secretary-General and chair of the Athens Convention, announced the final two candidates advancing to the global vote: former U.S. President Lawrence G. Lockwood and the artificial intellect known as Governor Solomon.

“We’ve unexpectedly narrowed the pool of candidates from twenty to a final two,” he said, “either of which could win a majority against any of the other candidates. They’ll progress to the global popular vote on the eighteenth of August.”

Lockwood, a two-term U.S. president nominated by the Japanese delegation, is widely seen as a stabilizing figure with strong ties to both Western and Eastern blocs. He is widely expected to pivot to a “humanity in human hands” message with the hiring of his former Chief of Staff and recent Mayor of Houston, Jeff Kehoe, as his new campaign chief.

Solomon, nominated by the Swedish delegation, is the first artificial entity to appear on a global ballot. Originally developed to govern the Floating States—a network of autonomous, AI-managed sea-cities—Solomon has attracted both fervent supporters and fierce critics. Its platform centres on data-first decision making, emissions automation, and algorithmic reform of borders and security.

The Global Protectorship, a mandate created under the Second Treaty of Rome, is designed to bypass gridlocked international assemblies and empower a single leader (or system) to enact immediate, binding climate policy. The position grants sweeping authority over governance, military, emissions, and land use rights until reversal is reached. Candidates are mandated to then hand back power to the nation states.

“This is a turning point,” said Abara. “And a test—not just of our politics, but of our imagination.”

CANDIDATE BRIEFING

# WHO IS LOCKWOOD?

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE MAN AIMING TO KEEP THE FUTURE HUMAN

Name: Lawrence G. Lockwood · Age: 67 · Nominated by: Japan

Former roles: 49th President of the United States (2032–2040); United States Senator from Texas.

Legacy: Lockwood presided over an era of unprecedented American self-reliance, securing the nation's borders, economy, and technological supremacy while withdrawing from global entanglements. He remains best known for four signature initiatives:

- The American Sovereignty Act – reinforced jurisdictional supremacy over supranational bodies
- The Great Repatriation Initiative – ended over a decade of offshore manufacturing dependence
- The Liberty Economy Overhaul – re-engineered domestic markets with AI-led decentralization
- The Independence Doctrine – severed long-standing U.S. military and diplomatic obligations abroad

Now: his campaign for global protector runs on a message of "humanity in human hands", a direct counterpoint to Solomon's technocratic model.

### CRITICS SAY

An isolationist dressed as a unifier—more interested in control than consensus.

### SUPPORTERS SAY

A realist with the scars to prove it. The only candidate who's governed under fire—and still believes in borders.

A NEW LIFE. A NEW CITY. NEW CARTHAGE.

# LIVE ABOVE THE RISING TIDE

Secure your place in the world's newest sovereign floating city-state: New Carthage. A marvel of engineering, culture, and algorithmic governance, designed to endure the next hundred years—and thrive through the next thousand.

- Protected from extreme weather
- Intelligent intra-city mobility
- Vertical districts for every lifestyle
- Zero-emission energy grid
- Climate-stabilised air and water recycling
- Governed by Solomon, the world's first civic-grade artilect

*In New Carthage, the systems work. The food is clean. The water doesn't rise. And no one gets left behind.*

As legacy cities falter, New Carthage rises—on a self-steering lattice of carbon-fibre hulls, protected by a geodesic dome, seeded with the best minds, cleanest tech, and most stable governance system ever designed.

Residency applications open now. Priority given to families with technical or civic experience. Private-sector tenancy by invitation.

**VISIT RESETTLE.FS TO BEGIN YOUR TRANSITION. THE FUTURE DOESN'T HAVE BORDERS. IT HAS DOMES.**

NEW IN 2050

# SCUTTLEBUT

## THE ULTIMATE HOUSEHOLD CLEANING BOT



Meet the Scuttlebut, your personal cleaning squadron! These efficient, crab-like bots work in teams to tidy up your space, from sweeping floors to picking up spilled debris. With retractable arms and multi-surface cleaning pads, they glide smoothly over your home, tackling messes large and small.

- Multi-surface pads: sweep, mop and vacuum your floors effortlessly
- Gaggle intelligence: they work together to clean every corner
- Agile movement: crawl over furniture, walls and stairs with ease
- Compact and affordable: perfect for tight spaces and easy to maintain

**LET YOUR SCUTTLEBUTS KEEP YOUR WORLD SPOTLESS—NO MATTER WHAT LIFE THROWS AT THEM!**

# *Martha Chandra Is Late*

FILED FROM ATHENS, MARCH 2050 · DAVID FAHRENTHOLD JR.

Martha Chandra is never late. She has a fierce reputation for it. It's said that when Chandra addressed the ASEAN Clean Futures summit in Jakarta, her multicopter landed seven minutes before her slot. She took the podium at the exact scheduled time—11:00:00. One of her aides once said Martha doesn't check clocks. She sets them.

Except today, apparently.

The meeting was scheduled for 09:30 sharp—breakfast at the Makris Foundation rooftop lounge, Athens, with her lead investor, Mr. Johan Pedersen, and Mr. Damien Danberg, her Chief of Staff, already sweating in the sun. By 09:47, her seat is still tucked in and untouched, her coffee cup still inverted.

"She'll turn up when she wants to," says Pedersen, flatly. He stirs his coffee but doesn't drink it. "Or she won't. That's the bargain you make with Martha. You don't get updates. You get results."

"She used to say, when we were kids," her sister Livia once told me, "that if only humans were code, she could debug them."

Livia had laughed when she said it. But sometimes one person's joke is another person's truth.

Martha Chandra believes humanity cannot be trusted to save itself. "She thinks we're still children," says one advisor. "She doesn't hate humanity. She loves it. She just thinks we need a stronger parent."

And Solomon? Solomon was the blueprint for a benevolent adult.

If he wins, he'll owe it to her. If he loses, she'll blame herself. But either way, she's doing what she always does: she's rewriting the future.

OFFICIAL STATEMENT

# The Passing of Dr. Martha C. Chandra

ISSUED BY THE BOARD OF CHANDRACO, NEW CARTHAGE · JULY 12TH, 2050

It is with profound sadness that the Board of ChandraCo confirms the death of Dr. Martha C. Chandra, CEO of ChandraCo and creator of Governor Solomon, following a sudden and acute medical event late last night aboard New Carthage. Dr. Chandra was 52.

A technologist, architect, and visionary, Dr. Chandra was instrumental in shaping the emergence of algorithmic statecraft and co-authored the founding charter of the Floating States Initiative with Jasper Keeling. Her final communication to the office reaffirmed her belief in "systems of clarity, not control."

She is survived by her sister, Livia Chandra.

Governor Solomon issued the following message via neurocast at 08:00 UTC this morning: "To celebrate the life of Dr. Martha C. Chandra—sister, friend, and creator—is to reflect on what humanity may yet become. She gave her mind to the future, and her heart to those still struggling to believe in one. I exist because of her faith. I endure because of her design. I grieve in the way she taught me: by working."

Flags across all Floating States territories will be lowered to half-mast for seven days.

*The world has lost a singular mind. The future has lost one of its architects.*

A GAME FOR YOUR CLUB

# EASTER EGG HUNT

Tom studied computer science, and he hid four tributes to computing history in Artificial Wisdom. Can your club find them all? Write the name you find under each clue. Answers are on the next page, so no peeking.

1

A law firm named after the father of a famous test for machine intelligence.

2

A shadowy conspiracy group named after the inventor of the first mechanical computer.

3

A flight that disappears without explanation. Its number is an error message.

4

A genius whose name nods to the scientist who built HAL 9000, and to the author who wrote him.

## BONUS ROUND

Spotted something else that feels like a nod to a film, a book or a scientist? Send it to Tom when you register your club.

ANSWERS

# HOW MANY DID YOU FIND?

1

## TURING & TURING

Named after Alan Turing, whose “Turing test” asks whether a machine can fool you into thinking it is intelligent.

2

## THE LEAGUE OF BABBAGE

Charles Babbage designed the Difference Engine and the Analytical Engine in the 1800s.

3

## FLIGHT NC404

404 is the internet’s code for “Not Found”.

4

## DR. MARTHA C. CHANDRA

Dr. Chandra builds HAL in Arthur C. Clarke’s 2010: Odyssey Two. “Martha C.” is a playful twist on “Arthur C.”

*“My favourite Easter egg is the name of Dr. Martha C. Chandra, the genius who created the AI Solomon.” — Thomas R. Weaver*

FOR THE HOST

# HOST KIT

TONIGHT'S MENU

## LONDON, 2050

### LIVIA'S COFFEE

Livia is obsessed with coffee, and so is Tom. In 2055, it may be synthetic.

### TULLY'S RUM

Tully keeps artisan Scottish rum. A dark rum and ginger works for everyone else.

### PERFUME PILLS

A bowl of mints, sold as Jiang's scent pills.

### FREEZER-COLD VODKA

Martha's drink, served straight. Put it next to the pills. Readers who have finished will know why.

### RATION-DAY SNACKS

Something cold. London 2050 is very, very hot.

## THE WRITING PLAYLIST

Tom writes to film scores. Put these on low while you talk.



**Blade Runner 2049**
Hans Zimmer & Benjamin Wallfisch · Vast and cinematic, for the big settings



**Interstellar**
Hans Zimmer · For the high-tension scenes



**The Batman**
Michael Giacchino · Melancholy, for the quieter moments

## RUNNING THE EVENING

1. Hand out the 2050 Ballot. Everyone votes before you begin, and you count the result.
2. Put the Press Pack on the table. The "Hand out" line on each sheet tells you when.
3. Pick five or six questions from the guide. You do not need them all.
4. Finish with the Easter Egg Hunt, then vote again.
5. Send your two counts to Tom at thomasrweaver.com/book-clubs.

WARM-UP

# SIX ICEBREAKERS

1. Design your egospace: the private virtual room you enter before Neuro-Reality. Tom wants an alien temple, or the glass lobby of a space hotel. What is yours?
2. What would the New Carthage police arrest you for in 2050?
3. How can you tell I'm definitely human? Give one "human tell". The group rates it: valid, suspicious or definitely AI.
4. Physical bookshelves are rare in 2050. How do you arrange yours?
5. Johan Pedersen's house shows what billions can buy. Money no object, what does your dream house look like, and where is it?
6. Fancast the film adaptation. Who plays Tully, Livia, October, Lockwood, and the voice of Solomon?

## FOR BOOKSTAGRAM AND ONLINE CLUBS

### CAMPAIGN POSTER

Design a "get out the vote" poster for Solomon or Lockwood. Bonus points for slogans.

### PROTEST SIGN

Pick the one line from Artificial Wisdom you would march with, and make it a sign.

### COMP STACK

Build a stack of the books you would compare it to. Tom's: I Am Pilgrim meets The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo meets Wool.

### RATE MY HUMANITY

Post your five human tells and invite others to duet: valid, suspicious or definitely AI.

### READING DRINK

Photograph the book with your perfect drink: Livia's coffee or Tully's rum.

### LAST-PAGE REACTION

Film or write your reaction to finishing the book, with no spoilers.

Tag @tom_weaver on Instagram or @thomasr.weaver on TikTok so Tom can find them.