

# ARTIFICIAL WISDOM

---

THOMAS R. WEAVER



CHAINMAKER  
PRESS

First published in the United Kingdom in 2023 by Chainmaker Press

Copyright © 2023 by Thomas R. Weaver

The right of Thomas R. Weaver to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

ISBN: 978-1-7394343-0-4

Cover design by Mecob

This extract provided exclusively to LoveReading and is not for distribution beyond.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

<http://chainmaker.press>

LONDON, JULY 1<sup>st</sup> 2050

**M**arcus Tully pitched the tumbler as hard as he could at the screen. It slipped through the floating image and shattered against his study wall in a burst of golden rum. He glowered at the undamaged display, still hovering in his vision six feet away. Afternoon sun from the dusty floor-to-ceiling windows glistened from the crystal shards now scattered across the carpet tiles.

“Well,” a pundit sneered at the newscast host, “I just don’t accept the premise of your question. Ten years since this so-called *tabkhir* hit the Persian Gulf, and I see no credible evidence the heatwave really killed anyone. It was a coup, nothing more.”

Damn all *tabkhir*-deniers to a humid hell. Ten years since the threads of a hundred million lives were cut from those left behind. Ten years since Zainab, his wife, had died. Ten years of holding tight onto every memory in case they slipped away when his back was turned.

Shit, he was drunk.

The faint whirr of cleaning bots sounded across the room. He staggered over to the window, placing his palms against the cool glass, then

his forehead. Far below, the poor and desperate of London scurried around in the baking summer heat.

Ten years. Ten years today, but it still felt so fresh. Move on, they said. Get over her. But what if he didn't want to? What if the day he forgot her voice was when she was truly gone?

*Play call recording, he told his neuro-assistant. Marcus Tully and Zainab Tully, July the first, 2040.*

There was a beep—the sound of the old phone systems.

*“My love?” Zainab said.*

He squeezed his eyes shut at the sound of her voice, so alive, so real, as if he could reach out and touch her.

*“Hey, I’m here, Zee,” he said, a man with no idea his world was about to change. “You okay?”*

*“I’ve been better. Didn’t sleep well. None of us did. It’s too hot, and we’re having brownouts.”*

*“Pretty warm here too, today, though it’s early. Must be 8 a.m. in Kuwait?”*

There was a pause. *“Marcus, it’s really, really humid here this morning, and the heat ... I can barely move.”* Another pause. *“It can’t be good for the baby.”*

He could still remember the feeling of that first flickering moment of worry, that sudden sharpening of his attention. He opened his eyes again and stared at the skyline.

*“But your father has good aircon, right?” Tully said.*

*“The brownouts, Marcus.”* There was a crackle and she cut out for a moment. *“—Aircon isn’t working. Nothing’s working apart from the phones.”*

*“Maybe you should come home early? I know your mother wanted to spend time with you, before the birth, but —”*

*“I’ll come,” she said, too fast. “Let me know when you’ve booked the ticket, I can’t do it from here. The connection is as bad as the air—”*

There was another crackle, then nothing more.

*“Zee?” he said. “Zainab? Can you hear me?”*

But she was gone. It burned him up, not to know what really happened to her in the hours after that call, like a fathomless acid in his belly.

He lurched over to the desk and grabbed the rum bottle. Where the hell was the glass?

He sensed a *pang*—warning a notification was impending, like an artificial tingle deep within his forehead. A second later he could see the message teasing at the upper right periphery of his vision. Red-edged, for unknown contact. He ignored it and pulled the cork stopper, then took a gulp of the rum.

There was another pang, also red. He shook his head now and took another sip. A third pang made him groan, but he looked up.

*Tully, read the first message. Got a story you need to hear. Can we meet? Has to be right now.*

The second message read, *Government secrets, okay? Not safe.*

A third followed. *You got two mins, big shot, or I'm going to your competitors. Bradley maybe. Oh, this also concerns your wife.*

The bottle slipped from his hands and smashed on the edge of the desk, releasing a sickly stench. The cleaning bots bleeped disapprovingly. Tully blinked at the last message, reread the first two, then stared again at the third.

She'd been dead for ten years. What the hell would a whistleblower know about it?