

Living Fiction

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Choose your preferred mode of consumption using the buttons below.

Word-Only (WO): Traditional story mode. Read the words on the page and use your imagination.

Neural-Integration (NI): A fully immersive experience via a neuro-catheter attached to your scalp. Your brain will receive neuro-stimuli that enable you to experience, in real time, what the characters see, hear, smell, taste, touch and feel.

Optional (OPT): To switch between WO and NI, use the  icon at the top of each page to enter and exit NI instantly (neuro-catheter required).

WO

NI

OPT



The Librarian

Steve closes the feed. Break-time for TLR29134. Thank fuck. Poor bitch. He sets up TLR11892. Better. This puppy is sick but happy to give.

Do the crime, do the time. Steve has no truck with that. Lock 'em up by all means, but this?

Every library has a population of forty thousand tellers, each housed in a pod the size of a large coffin. One librarian manages two thousand pods. All that keeps costs down and security up. Tax payers love 'em. So do politicians.

Take TLR29134. She's serving eighteen months for burglary. When the feed's closed, she's offline. She can think or she can sleep. What she can't do is get out of that pod.

Most choose sleep.

Synthetic veins relay nutrients in and waste out. Regular rotation of the pods reduces the incidence of pressure injuries. Neuro-catheters are the bridge between mind and server.

Tellers are catalogued not by what they've done but by what they share. Like TLR29134. She was orphaned when she was seven. Survived a car crash that destroyed her parents. Now she gets to relive it via the feed because, somewhere, there's an authitect creating a masterpiece in which her experience will feature.

Living Fiction they call it.



Steve thinks the system is broken. It can't be right that TLR29134 will spend eighteen months sharing a nightmare while TLR11892 gets to mentally masturbate for the sake of a realistic transgressor narrative.

He doesn't care how cheap it is. That's not punishment. It's not doing the time.

Fortunately for TLR29134, there's not much demand for seven-year-old kids in car crashes. The same can't be said for serial killers and torturers. Christ, TLR11892 even has a wait-list, if you can believe that – authitects itching to hire him.

Back in the old days, before authitects and tellers, writers had to make their shit up. Libraries housed books, not crooks. And forget the feed; the only system a librarian had to worry about was the Dewey Decimal.

He doesn't touch the stuff. Give him word-only any day of the week. Or a violin concerto. No one gets tortured for that. He hopes.



The Authitect

THE AUTHITECTURE PODCAST

EPISODE 61

Welcome to this episode of The Authitecture Podcast. I'm Dave Griene and I'm your host. Today, I want to talk about suffering. Yep, you heard me.

I'm gonna be straight with you – I've got a right old bee in my bonnet about this. And since some of you are at the beginning of your story-creation journeys, I think it's worth addressing.

So this came about because the other day I was chatting with someone about writing, and they said that we're – and they actually used this word – *inferior* to the authors of the past because we don't make it up, don't sweat for it, don't live it, breathe it, lose sleep over it.

Let me tell you, I do all those things. I'm an artist. Creating a book isn't just about chucking a load of data from a feed into a drive and uploading it to Amazon. All my Living Fiction goes through a strict editorial process, just like books have always done.

The big-picture work comes first. I have to create my story, work out my plot, plant my clues, decide who's going to move around in the world I've built, and how and why. Good story architecture is essential: Setup, motive, denouement. The classic three-act structure.



Plus, there's a new problem – one that traditional authors never had to deal with but that we architects absolutely do. Digital coherency. So let's say I create a baddie. That character has a gender, a body, a belief system, a psychology, a pathology, an environment, a history, a motivation, a goal, an obstacle protagonist. All that stuff will determine their actions, and the emotions they experience as they act.

Living Fiction is a *thing* precisely because it's based on lived experience. Chances are you won't find just one perp in a plastic tub who has everything you need, unless you're Janna Jensen. There's a reason she's made stars out of her tellers. More likely you'll need forty or fifty threads, maybe more.

The research alone is time-consuming and hellishly expensive. It's not enough to find matches for your story. Those matches need to be a good fit *with each other*, otherwise the characterization becomes fragmented. That's what it takes if you want every piece of your narrative to ooze with integrity and offer a seamless experience for the plugged-in reader.

Now think about how many characters are in a book and you start to see what people like me are up against.

I have a contract with one of the big-name digital publishers, and the in-house support is a godsend. They make sure the data streams don't decay and give me a team of editors who check my Living Fiction to ensure that every paragraph, sentence and word stimulates the senses just as I intended.



Newbie authitects, listen up. Good editors are worth their weight in gold. Their fresh eyes, ears, fingers, tongues and noses ensure the tellers add substance to the characters in your books, but never dominate.

Plus, there's always a lot of noise in those feeds, and that has to be edited out. Locating a memory and reliving it into a neuro-cath without any junk requires a level of concentration that few possess. Memories, like the lives they were born from, are messy.

And don't forget – some people want WO mode. So I go to all that effort to create the full neural experience and I *still* have to make the words count, just in case the reader wants to use their own brain. That's what the moaners forget – the digital stuff doesn't replace the writing. It comes on top of it. I'm both author and neural architect. That's where the damn term authitect comes from, for Christ's sake!

And something else ... I know there are some who think that forcing tellers to relive past horrors is barbaric and has no place in a civilized world. But think about this. In the old days, those who created stories suffered for their writing. Now the criminals do it for us. Murderers, thieves, nonces, pimps and pervs all repurposing their experiences in the name of art.

I don't call that barbaric. I call it poetic justice.

Thanks for listening and letting me get that off my chest. Don't forget to rate and review The Authitecture Podcast if you enjoyed this episode. Let's talk soon!



The Indie Teller

Alicia shuts down the feed and logs off. She takes a slurp of latte number three and massages the small shorn patch on the back of her head where the feed-pad sits. Today's been productive, and she feels relaxed – not many of her friends can say that after a day's work. This has to be the best job in the world.

Alicia is paid to remember. She set up as an indie teller six months ago – website, social media profiles, a vlog ... it's all there. For her, at least.

She savours that thought. Kneads it against the memory of the news article she'd clicked on earlier. A man had killed himself – a former inmate who'd done two years in a library. Thirty-six hours after his release he unplugged himself from the life sentence in his head. The memories he'd been forced to repeatedly pipe into the feed were horrendous ... just thinking about them had upset her. She can't imagine wanting even to read the words, never mind taste and smell them. He went in desperate and came out broken. The offences hadn't even been that serious to her mind – car theft and DUI. Certainly not worth the man's life.

There's a lot of controversy around telling, well, the library version of it anyway. She gets it. The tellers in those pods are milked for their monstrous memories, and from what she's hearing, time in the clink for some of the more unsavoury characters is more reward than restorative justice.



And then there's the inmates sentenced for lesser crimes. They broke the law, yes, but wasn't their waywardness at least in part a product of circumstance – poverty, illness, desperation? She can well imagine making similar mistakes had her life been different. Those poor souls are paying a price, but to her it seems disproportionate to the crime.

The indie teller market is on the up, though. The mainstream publishing industry was so busy building mega-servers of living memory that it barely noticed Mindle Direct Publishing tiptoeing on its coat tails.

The Mindle brought the feed to the masses, and it wasn't long before indie authitects began creating *their* stories *their* way ... and they needed tellers.

Enter Alicia. Two deaths in the family, a cancer scare, a weird thing with a stalker guy in her early twenties, and three devastating miscarriages. Fodder for the DIYers, perhaps. Funnily enough, though, that's not what she's commissioned for.

She's had her fair share of ache and break, but, in the main, her life has been a tender one. And the people who visit her website? They're looking for someone who's prepared to tell about the good times.

She neuro-caths ...

– the song of the sea. Waves break on the shore below the French windows of a house they've rented in Devon. It's dark but she can hear their liquid rhythm.

– his declaration. He wants to grow wrinkly with her. A love!



– the Morse-like heartbeat of an eight-week-old foetus in her belly. It flashes white on the monitor. Alive!

– the dining room of her childhood. There's a tabletop Christmas tree in the corner laden with glass baubles. The wall behind is bathed in red, green, yellow, pink. She can smell the pine.

– a Labrador's soft yellow head against her arm. It's winter. The room is warm from the fire dancing in the hearth and the laughter of her child and husband. They're playing Crazy Eights.

– a woodpigeon cooing outside the caravan on the island. The light is different here though she can't work out why. The air smells of seaweed and salt.

Alicia shares myriad moments of ordinary magic. She is everyday life for hire. That some find comfort in the essence of her gentle pleasures is a wonder.



The Publisher

DIGIBOOKCON

IN CONVERSATION WITH VINCENT MANOLA, HEAD OF
DIGITAL PUBLISHING, DRIFT PRESS

—Vincent, welcome and thank you for joining us. Drift Press pioneered Living Fiction. Tell us how it all began.

—It's great to be here. So Living Fiction started out as an experiment, if I'm honest. We were looking for a way to turn watchers into readers. Three decades ago, Netflix and Prime began spoon-feeding busy, entertainment-hungry audiences with readymade content on multiple devices. And, sure, book sales – print and digital – were still relatively stable, which meant the ship wasn't sinking.

Here's the thing though – you don't create an environment for long-term growth by cocooning yourself in a bubble of *now*. You need to stretch, push the boundaries, embrace a vision – not of what is, but of what might be. So we and a few others started playing with interactive digital works.

—But you were still working with the old publishing model ...

—Pretty much. So let's say you downloaded a book to your e-reader, and you came to a scene with a group of monks singing a Gregorian chant in a Benedictine seminary. You'd click on an icon by the text and be able to hear the music.



—The academic presses were doing this too, weren't they?

—Absolutely. One of the earliest examples was a forensic science textbook in which you clicked through to videos of autopsies and crime-scene investigations. The whole thing had begun to move in an enrichment direction.

—Though video had been around for decades ...

—Sure, but we pushed further. With Living Fiction it was the first time the reader didn't have to switch to a different piece of software or another platform. What we did was offer the reader a one-stop shop. We consolidated the multimedia experience. Before, it had been interruptive.

So take audiobooks. That was an alternative if you wanted to hear a voice, but it still meant different software, Audible or something. Entertainment used to be all about boxing. Think about it – video versus audio versus writing. Series versus movies. Novels versus short fiction versus serial fiction. And hardbacks versus paperbacks versus e-books.

Even the traditionally conservative BBC realized before we did that it was time to stop forcing the consumer to choose.

And so that's what we wanted to do – offer an all-encompassing experience that gave the reader something more than a *read*, and in a way that was seamless.

—**Still, it was quite a shift from video segments to a full neural-integration or NI experience.**

—You’re right. But there were three breakthroughs that opened the door for the book trade. The first was Alzheimer’s research. So it works like this. When we smell, taste, hear, see, touch, all that sensory input creates electrical activity in the hippocampus. Each event has a unique signature, or ‘spike train’. In people with Alzheimer’s, the spike trains come to a standstill before those sensory experiences can be stored as memory. Neuroscientists developed implants that acted as kind of hubs – grabbing the data, coding it and moving it on. Kind of like the neural version of the control room at Charing Cross Station.

So, once science had found a way to locate, access and, most importantly, capture specific memories, there was no reason why anyone couldn’t plug in. That’s where it started. Those implants became the pad that now sits on the scalp when we’re accessing Living Fiction feeds, or when the tellers are transmitting.

The second issue was storage. Quantum computing changed everything. Now that we have stable 2,000-qubit systems, data processing is faster than ever.

The third was Amazon’s input ... a portable device like an e-reader that would enable the consumer to access this neural data easily. You know what? They were going to call it the MindReader, but the public weren’t having any of it. Way too creepy. Plus the



Kindle was already a well-loved brand. So they changed a letter and the Mindle was born!

—On the subject of minds, let’s talk now about the neuro-catheters. Tell us how they work.

—So the neuro-catheters are conduits for the data feed between the mind and the server. Think of them as a bridge connecting two sides of a river. The only difference between a teller and a reader is the direction in which the feed flows. A teller gives; a reader receives.

And I know there are still some people who won’t go anywhere near a neuro-catheter. We talk about plugging in but it’s not invasive, honestly! There’s no surgical incision. It’s not like back in the days of deep-brain stimulation when electrodes were implanted directly into tissue. It’s more like an EEG – like I said, just a small pad on the back of the scalp. No bigger than a penny. You can’t even see where the head’s shaved. I love that we’re influencing fashion though! Nike just launched a range of beanies and caps with Mindle ports so you can access your Living Fiction regardless of the weather.

—Yeah, I saw that. Very cool.

—But headwear aside, neuro-cathing means readers no longer have to imagine anything. You read the words on the page and the feed does it all for you. So here’s an example. Imagine Sammy’s in a noisy bar with a group of friends. He’s the viewpoint character. Josh sits down at a table. Sammy is attracted to Josh. As the



reader takes in the text on the page, they experience Sammy hearing the background noise in the room, seeing Josh's body, tasting the wine on his tongue, and feeling the arousal in his genitals.

That's Living Fiction. All the senses. It's a completely immersive experience.

—Talking of which, there's been some criticism around how the mainstream publishing industry has exploited this. At Drift Press, for example, you have a celebrity authitect who's on her third living autobiography. Critics have called it neuroporn. How do you respond to that?

—Publishers have always been the gatekeepers of storytelling. I'm not saying there isn't room for self-publishers and indie authitects, but we remain committed to providing a supportive publishing environment for our creators – editorial, sales, marketing and PR, rights, translation options, access to memory feeds, and data control and storage. It's about process. Lack of process has a negative impact on quality, credibility and visibility.

Ask any librarian or publisher about what comes through those feeds. There's a lot of extraneous information that needs to be removed before it can be integrated into a book.

And the hard truth is this: process costs money. Our Star Minds imprint is astonishingly popular with readers, and the income generated is what allows us to



invest in the new talent coming through for niche genres.

And while celebrity memoir might not be everyone's cup of tea, the quality of our neural feeds is exceptional – especially for those who've invested in high-quality cath. Truly authentic.

—And finally, Vincent, what innovations are in the pipeline for Drift?

—I think the most exciting thing for us right now is the holiday-reading programme. I'm not talking about the current model whereby a reader decides which stories they'll download to their Mindle and devour by the pool. Instead, we want to bring the pool to them. Imagine a book that lasts for two weeks, one in which you share in the lived experience of, say, a safari break, trekking in the jungle or visiting the orangutan nurseries in Borneo. Throw in a romance, a bit of danger, a mystery ... whatever takes your fancy.

That's a big jump from the current Living Fiction model because it involves looking after the reader's body during the story vacation. However, we're talking with the libraries and learning how they use the teller pods. All I can say is, watch this space!



The Mindle Junkie

My Mindle is stacked. If I'd been born fifty years ago I wouldn't have touched books with a barge pole. My gran is word-only all the way, and in print too. She wants to hold the thing, turn the pages. That's fine by me. Each to their own.

What puts me off is the work involved. Reading is supposed to be a pleasure, but for me it's a drag. All those nudges – action beats, speech tags, scene descriptions. It's a ball-ache having to pay attention to that stuff, and yet in WO mode it's essential if you want to understand the story properly.

With the Mindle, it's all done for you, and I love it. I can skim over the boring stuff and let the feed do the work.

My neuro-cath is awesome – top of the range. If you're serious about reading, it's the only way to go. Cheaper caths do the job but the feed stream tends to buffer. Kind of spoils it when your eyes are scanning a fight scene and instead of getting an adrenaline rush you're hit by the smell of the apples from two paragraphs up.

My preferred Living Fiction genres are action adventure and thriller. My favourite authitect is Janna Jensen. I heard her interviewed on The Authitecture Podcast a couple of weeks back. She is totally on it. She uses a combo of library-based and indie tellers.

There are a ton of former soldiers and mercenaries – private sector, she called them – who are more than



happy to neuro-cath their combat experiences into a data server if the price is right.

For her bad guys, she uses the libraries. She talked about how enhanced state surveillance had smashed up the organized crime syndicates, and how the bosses might be in jail but still need to feed their families. She giggled as she said it, and I wasn't sure if she was talking about the wife and kids or *family* family. Still, it came as a bit of a shock – that you can go to jail for murder, corruption and human trafficking and get paid for sharing that kind of stuff. And they earn a shitload. Seems crime does pay, after all.

I remember this one teller she mentioned – it made me laugh because the crim's a headcase, yet he's got a Bond thing in his pod number ... What was it again? Something like 10071. And this guy's one of her regulars – she uses him in every book. There's a limit placed on how much inputting the tellers do but she got round it – offered a cash incentive, and a little something for the library. They'd all agreed to up his feed time.

And this is the weird bit. Now he's in demand – his stuff's that good. I can vouch for it too. I've got *Steal 'Em and Stick 'Em*, *Arse Butcher*, and *Pony Play*. Those stories are the shit. Total mindfuck. Or should that be Mindlefuck? Whatever. Anyway, it's got to the point where he needs an agent. WTF is *that* all about?



The Quiet Reader

I run my fingertips over the cover. It's smooth all over but for the title and the author's name. There, the letters are raised. I close my eyes and see if I can work them out but they make no sense unless I'm looking.

There's a picture on the cover too – a seascape with a lone figure staring into the distance. The book is about a man who can't remember who he is. I decide he's trying to find himself in that ocean.

There are five hundred pages inside, all covered with tiny writing. The paper feels ever so slightly gritty, though not in an unpleasant way.

And it smells. I hear talk of this often, of how much it's missed. Not all books smell the same, of course. It depends where they've been stored, how old they are, what kind of paper they're printed on, and what the binding's made of. Me? I'm not so bothered about that.

What I love is the silence.

I read the words on the first page. What I sense is not a void. There is a *something* that sits behind and around as I process the words, sentences, and paragraphs, fusing them with images I conjure to bring sense to it all. But it's a quiet, solitary experience.

My mind's voice, my mind's eye.

It is bliss.

Gone is the dislocation, the neural onslaught I experience when I plug in to Living Fiction.



These words, these characters, this world ... none of it is mine. And, yet, I have freedom in this place. It is as real as I choose it to be but no more.

What the author describes I can neither see, nor touch, nor taste, nor hear. Instead, I imagine I can. And that's enough.

The joy, the fear, the confusion, the relief, they are not my emotions. Instead, I imagine they are. And that too is enough.

This book, and the tale within it, is a twilight zone where blurred senses guide me quietly as the tickertape of letters moves across my vision.

I am reading.

Words only.

A noiseless gift.



The Data Merchant

THE TIMES, LONDON BRIDGE STREET, SE1

—Let me get this straight. You're saying you've found intelligence and security comms in the Mindle database.

—Yes. Google Books too. The thing you need to understand is that with the advent of stable quantum computing, traditional public-key cryptography became a joke. Government, banking, commerce, the scientific community – all of them were so keen to reap the benefits that they forgot to pay analogous and simultaneous attention to the threats. And that's despite the numerous warnings. Google it. The internet is awash with articles that talk about breach risk. Some of them go back as far as 2016. We knew about the potential harms before we'd even built the damn things.

I'm not saying it wasn't a surprise. It's clever. Really clever. MI5 and MI6 intel just sitting there in plain sight, cloaked by the invisibility of its apparent uselessness.

—Meaning?

—Some authitects commission their feeds but most pick and choose from a database, especially in the indie market. The feeds have to be high quality and findable, and that means the tagging needs to be relevant. Then the servers' built-in algorithms score the feed on congruence, stability and purity.



Congruence means that a certain percentage of the content has to match the tags assigned by the librarians, or in the case of the self-publishing sector, the indie tellers.

Stability relates to how quickly the data decays. Tellers using lower-quality neuro-caths produce feeds with more interference – like the static on a busted analogue screen or pixilation on a smart TV.

Purity is about the quality of the content. Experienced tellers focus harder so the reliving of events isn't fragmentary. Imagine having a conversation with someone and being interrupted every five or ten seconds. That's what an impure feed's like.

Even an authitect with a small budget won't bother with feeds that score sub-thirty. And that's where I found this stuff – the intel is housed in the crap feeds where no one will find it.

—Except you. You found it. So what made you look there?

—I make a living from analysing data. Patterns are what interest me, especially changes in them. That's where you find interesting stuff. Sub-thirty feeds increased by ten per cent last year. Something like that makes me take notice.

—Is there any way they could know their feeds have been accessed, and by whom? What I'm asking is, can you be traced?

—Stats are limited on both servers, so they’ll know someone’s been in but not where or who.

—**And what do you want, Mr Preston?**

—I’m a data merchant.

—**You mean a hacker.**

—No, a data merchant. I find and sell data. I’ve given you my price. It’s a big number but a fair one, given the scoop I’m offering. In exchange, I’ll show you where the feeds are. I doubt you’ll find them otherwise. After that, it’s up to you what you do with the information.

—**I don’t see that we can do anything with this ‘scoop’ as you call it. Can you imagine the chaos if we were to go to the country with this? Our bank accounts are vulnerable. The state doesn’t trust its own encryption. The security of the nation is in the hands of intelligence services creating rogue Living Fiction feeds to manage their covert ops ... Half the population would roll around laughing. The other half would riot. And we’d be sitting ducks for our enemies. Not exactly a story that plays well for the defence of the realm, is it?**

—Then I’ll take it to the *Guardian*.

—**You do that, Milo. Let me call you a cab. It’s the least I can do after all your hard work.**

Milo fumes. Fucking stuck-up establishment idiots. They don’t have a clue. The country’s going to hell in



a handcart and they have the audacity to talk about defence of the realm. Jesus.

‘You’ve gone the wrong way, mate. This takes us south over the river. We need to be heading for N1 – I need the *Guardian*.’

‘Don’t worry yourself, sir. I’ve been told exactly where to take you. And I’m told there’s plenty of newspapers in the library.’



The Librarian

Steve opens the feed. It's a newbie – pod 32065. Miserable as piss. Doesn't stop moaning about how he's innocent, been set up, the papers are colluding with organized crime ... Blah blah.

He's heard it too many times. They all say it. It doesn't make any difference. He's just a librarian.

The neural-location brief is unusual. He can't work out why anyone would want something so dull ... TLR32065 will be reliving his own readings of Living Fiction. There's a ton of data. Must have spent hours on his Mindle. And now he's creating a feed of himself accessing the feed. One man on both sides of the river.

Meta or what?