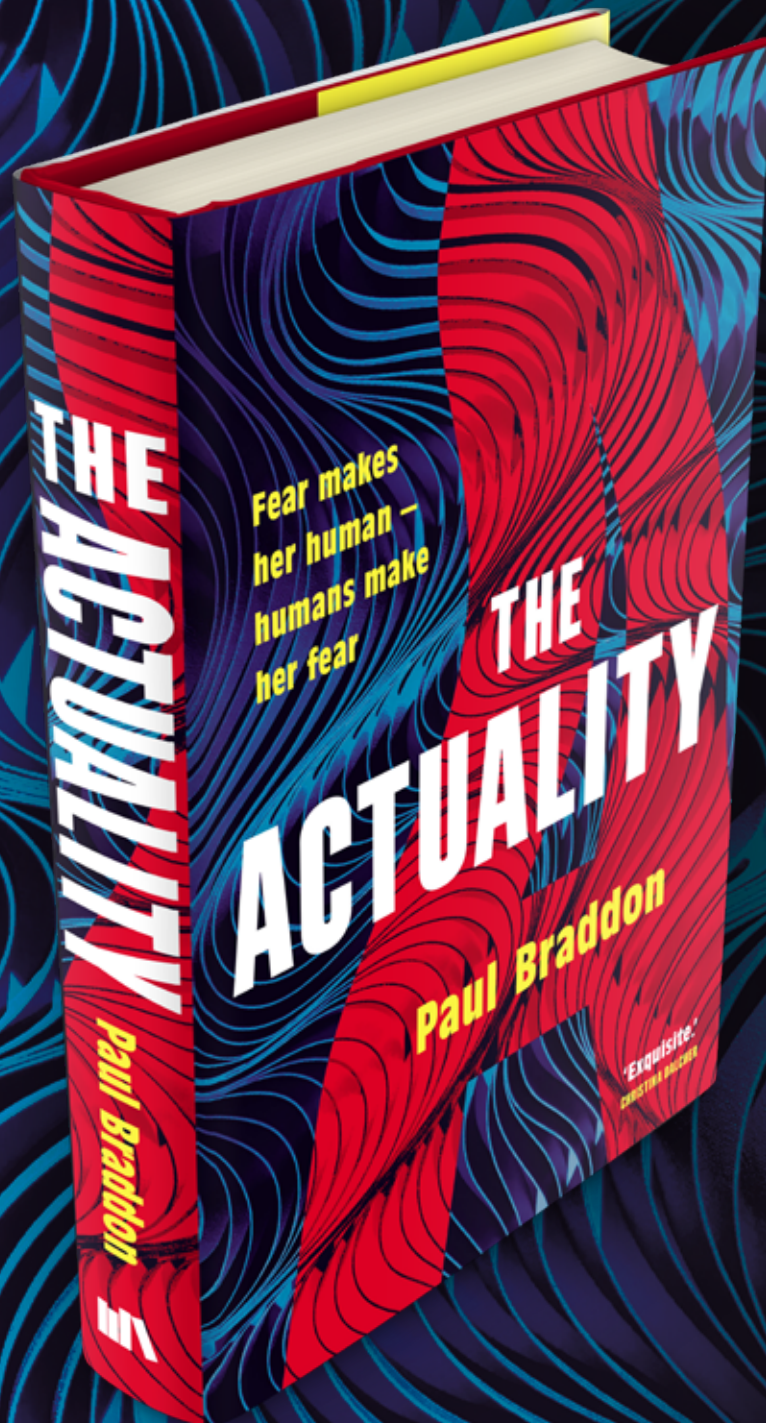


# BOOK CLUB KIT



**WARNING!**  
**CONTAINS SPOILERS**



# A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Book Lover,

Once in a while, a really special debut comes along – something that as an editor, I feel truly privileged to work on. *The Actuality* by Paul Braddon is such a book.

**Evie, a bio-engineered human replica, lives with her 'husband' and his servant, Daniels. When knowledge of her illegal existence is leaked, she is forced into the terrifying world outside.**

This book combines the best features of the speculative genre. It is a suspenseful chase, as Evie is pursued by a number of individuals and groups intent on capturing her for their own purposes. It is a masterclass in characterisation, as the reader is continually presented with Evie's inner world – so distinctly unhuman even as she is preoccupied with human concerns. It is a new exploration of age old themes such as what it means to be human and how people connect with one another, compelling the reader to love Evie and her companions even as they barrel towards a shattering ending. Do not miss this spectacular read.

We would love to hear reviews from booksellers and readers across the country! Please don't hesitate to get in touch if a visit from Paul would fit your shop or book group.

Warm wishes,  
Kay Farrell  
Assistant Publisher

# SUGGESTIONS FOR ONLINE BOOK CLUBS

## Hosting

Pick a video conferencing platform you're comfortable with – Google Meet and Zoom are popular options. The good news is that most of us are familiar with these platforms at this stage! While there are free options, many of these programs do have a cost attached for the host.

Someone in the group will need to take responsibility for sending round the invitation and making sure that everyone has the link to join. Having a 'leader' is very helpful during the book club meeting itself – having someone asking the questions, making sure everyone gets to speak, and keeping the conversation on track is even more important online than in person.

Set the date of the meeting in plenty of time and send a reminder a week in advance to give everyone a chance to read the book.

## Test run

Offer to do a test run, ideally a day or two before the book club discussion, for anyone who isn't familiar with the chosen video conferencing option.

## Set an agenda

This may sound terribly formal, but it really helps! Online meetings come with heightened risks of awkward silences AND everyone speaking at once – having an agenda can help avoid these issues.

Start with basic housekeeping, sharing the agenda and asking everyone to press mute when they aren't speaking.

## Make the most of being online

Being online has lots of advantages – it's really easy to share links to relevant articles, videos and more, you can send imagery to other attendees, and you don't have to go out into the cold or make snacks for anyone else to 'go to' book club!

Make the most of the conferencing software, and try using their options for running polls and hosting small quizzes. Find out how many stars each member of your group would give the book, or pick your next book club read.

**For information on book club discounts and how to invite Paul Braddon to speak to your reading group, check the last page of this booklet!**

# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

Evie and Daniels are close friends. Do you think that such a caring relationship might ever be possible between a human and a machine?

Simon is described as eavesdropping Evie's every thought - if you were to wake one day with such an onboard companion of the opposite sex, how would you react?

The roof top garden is unique and a special place for Evie but what emotions does it raise in you?

The world in the novel is quite bleak. Are you more optimistic for the future or does the depiction ring true?

If you had a choice of an additional room for your home, would you have:

- a) Yuliya's room with its video walls, or
- b) Maier's room overlooking a lake and mountain?

If you were casting the movie of the book, do you know who you would want to play either Evie or David?

Do you think machines could ever possess a genuine sense of morality or conscience?

If the equivalent to Evie was ever created, what impact do you think it would have on human relationships?

If you were able to meet Matthew, what might you want to say to him?



# Q&A WITH PAUL BRADDON

Without giving too much away, could you tell us a bit about your new novel?

*The Actuality* is set in a climate-ravaged near-future in which technology has raced ahead then seized up. At the heart of this dangerous world, trying to make sense of it all, is Evie – as soulful and aware of her limitations as any human but crucially not human!

What inspired and influenced you in writing this book?

I was treading in the footsteps of Frankenstein as much as modern classics, but the key difference is that AI characters are often shown to be feared. My challenge was to make Evie someone the reader can root for and love, and when required, take her side.

*The Actuality* kicks off in a garden and follows a character called Evie - it certainly seems like there's a connection to the Bible. Could you tell us a bit about that?

The garden you refer to is at the top of high-rise building and, similar to Eden, is both a haven and something of a prison. Also like Eden, there's the danger that one can be cast out!

While your book follows an AI, it's very focused on humanity – was this something you were driven by while writing?

It's exciting to see the world through perspectives other than our own and how better than through that of an intelligent but inexperienced AI mind? For Evie, being as close to human as possible is essential and it's natural for her to experience unease when exposed. It was imagining the detail of what it would like to be in her position and making her act accordingly that hopefully brings her to life. Add Evie's unique situation and the real danger she faces, and the result is an intriguing challenge for any writer.

AI as a replacement for lost loved ones isn't a new concept, though the way you handle it feels fresh and unique. Why did you want to explore this idea?

The question of what makes us what we are is central to *The Actuality*. Evie is expected to seamlessly replicate a woman she has never met, suppressing her own personality in the process. I wanted to imagine how difficult the resulting conflict and compromise would feel.

Could you tell us a bit about developing dystopian settings that are at once familiar, strange and futuristic?

I visited all the locations in which *The Actuality* is set and walked the routes that Evie takes, seeing what she would see and allowing the imagination to do its thing. The best bit was visiting Paris as it was an excuse for a fab (pre-Covid) weekend!

Last, but definitely not least, how does it feel to have your book optioned by BBC Studios?

It feels brilliant. BBC Studios are so enthusiastic it is amazing. We're only at the stage of the option, so I have to be careful about dreaming too far ahead, but a series along the lines of what they envisage would be so exciting.

# BOOK CLUBS AND THE ACTUALITY

## Meet the author

If you'd like Paul Braddon to speak to your book club, get in touch! Email Sandstone Press on [info@sandstonepress.com](mailto:info@sandstonepress.com).

While library and bookshop events aren't an option at the moment, it may be possible to arrange for Paul to join your book club virtually. This is a great way of introducing your club to the book before you've started reading it, or to get any questions you have after finishing the book answered by the author herself.

## Discounts

Sandstone Press is able to arrange group discounts for book clubs in the UK and Ireland with 5 or more members through our online shop. If this is something your group would be interested in, please email us on [info@sandstonepress.com](mailto:info@sandstonepress.com).

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If you have questions for Paul, you can find him on [Twitter](#) or visit his website at [paulbraddon.com](http://paulbraddon.com).