



INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

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SophiAI

By Penpheer

Genre: Science Fiction / Technothriller

Reviewed by Gabriella Harrison

A tension-filled technothriller driven by high-stakes, deep grief, and ambitious technology

Amid WW3, Professor Larry Tusk embarks on a super-secret mission to create the world's first autonomous, self-aware AI—and the daughter he never had.

After losing his wife and their son to a terrorist attack while he was away on an errand, Larry struggles to cope with the loss. Interestingly, his obsession with AI contributed to the neglect of the family he already had. His wife, whom he describes as someone who understood him deeply, would complain about his obsessive pursuit of his work. Now, he is determined to give his creation the love and family life he lost.

Larry is an extremely wealthy, well-known scientist, but as pressure mounts with competing powers developing rival AI programs to give them an edge in the war, his status doesn't prevent the government from attempting to forcefully take over his work (Sophie), creating a tense environment and the need for security reinforcements for an already heavily protected and secluded base.

Ana Waina, with its secluded mountain setting and concealed computing infrastructure, provides a rather convincing backdrop for Larry's secretive work. And the rival AI programs take the conflict beyond a straightforward battle between humans and machines, revealing competing ambitions and beliefs about who should control advanced technology. Author Penpheer asks pressing questions about consciousness and morality, with the military preparations adding an exciting urgency while readers get to follow how everything is progressing in different locations through multiple viewpoints before it all gradually comes together.

Larry is responsible for creating Sophie. She even lovingly calls him daddy. But as he tries to protect his facility and give her time to develop, he still has to accept that she's

quickly developing a mind and personality of her own, even as her decisions take her beyond his carefully planned boundaries.

“Inevitably, incessantly, Sophie asked him questions which led to explanations which led to long discussions and, Larry felt, started to shape her own budding opinions on things.”

Sophie, while extraordinarily intelligent, doesn’t have everything figured out. She most definitely doesn’t have all the answers. ***“In one of my darkest moments, when I could not find a way forward, I was literally paralyzed with uncertainty.”*** Her conversations with General Kowalski capture the importance of hope and faith when logic alone cannot resolve uncertainty. When she reaches an impasse, Kowalski encourages her to keep exploring possible solutions rather than treating uncertainty as inevitable failure, helping her recognize the value of possibilities that cannot yet be proven.

With the world outside Ana Waina becoming increasingly more dangerous, the bond between Larry and Sophie adds tender moments to an otherwise tense story preoccupied with technological advancement and international conflict. There are times when there seems to be a bit of a struggle to balance the different storylines, though, and detailed explanations of technical systems and political developments can occasionally slow things down, such as the descriptions of Larry’s underground facility, its security arrangements, and the infrastructure supporting the operation before returning to the central character-driven story.

At times, some conversations feel more like opportunities to deliver background information than natural exchanges between people who already know one another. Sophie’s reflections on sacrifice and human compassion—as she interacts with different characters who challenge her understanding of loyalty and what it means to be human—take the book beyond the victory or defeat of military conflict, forcing us to ask thoughtful questions about what powerful machines might become and to consider what should guide their decisions.

Combining artificial intelligence and military strategy with thought-provoking philosophy, Penpheer’s *SophiAI: The Story of C.H.I.L.D.* is an ambitious science-fiction thriller that questions the boundaries between technological creation and personhood, skillfully wielding geopolitical intrigue. Sophie’s evolving relationship with humanity gives this first installment a thoughtful foundation for further exploration in the following books.