



SHADOW BEHIND THE ETERNITY:

A SCI-FI THRILLER

SARAH LYNNE AQUINO

Shadow Behind the Eternity

By
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Shadow Behind the Eternity: A Sci-Fi Thriller

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About the Author

Salehin Ashfi discovered his love for writing at fifteen, drawn to the power of storytelling to unlock hidden worlds and evoke deep emotions. With a unique blend of experience in cybersecurity and an insatiable curiosity for life's mysteries, Ashfi's work dives into the intersection of science, humanity, and the resilience that defines us.

In his debut novel, he offers readers a journey through themes of sacrifice, time, and the relentless pursuit of truth—a taste of what's to come from his storytelling journey. This is just the beginning; Ashfi is committed to bringing his readers stories that challenge, captivate, and leave a lasting mark, always striving to reach new levels of narrative perfection.

Expect his future works to explore even richer dimensions, each story pushing the boundaries of imagination and connection.

Acknowledgments

This book exists because of the support, encouragement, and inspiration that so many people have gifted me along the way.

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To my mentors and teachers, who first sparked my love for storytelling and words: you are the ones who ignited this passion, and your influence fills every chapter. Your guidance and encouragement have left an indelible mark on my work and my heart.

And to you, the reader, who now holds this book in your hands—I am humbled and grateful for the chance to share this story with you. This book is as much yours as it is mine. My deepest hope is that, somewhere in these pages, you find words that resonate, moments that linger, and stories that echo in your own life.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

"The whispers of the past are like forgotten shadows, carrying buried words and feelings, hidden beneath the sands of time. Yet, like the moonlight slipping through cracks in the clouds, they find us when we least expect it. In the delicate imperfection of these moments, in the space between seconds, we unearth the perfect ones—those whose flaws are like cracks in porcelain, making them all the more beautiful. Their presence is a silent revelation, a quiet reminder that perfection is found not in flawlessness, but in the fragile, beautiful dance of imperfection. Perfectly imperfect, they are the souls we carry with us, forever etched in the heart's deepest chambers."

— Salehin Ashfi

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Chapter 1: The Digital Afterlife

Elise Mercer stood at the edge of a historic moment, her heart pounding beneath the tailored jacket that symbolized her ascent in the tech world. As the lead architect of **Eternia**, she was about to unveil her life's work—a digital afterlife that promised to redefine human existence. The auditorium was packed with influential figures: technology tycoons, esteemed researchers, and media moguls, all eager to witness the dawn of a new era.

Behind her, a massive screen displayed a breathtaking vista of Eternia: endless fields of flowers that shimmered like molten opals, hills crowned by ancient oaks, and a deep blue sky kissed by the golden hues of sunset. At the center, the **Central Nexus**—a crystalline tower emitting a soft, inviting glow—stood as the beacon of this virtual paradise.

Elise's voice rang out with conviction. "Eternia is not just a digital construct; it's a new frontier of human existence. Here, consciousness isn't limited by the confines of the physical body. Residents can live, love, create, and explore—forever."

But her heart was not in her words. A bead of sweat trickled down her spine, a reminder of the gnawing anxiety that had plagued her for weeks. Her daughter, **Sophie**, was one of the first to upload her consciousness to Eternia. What was meant to be a triumphant moment was now marred by Sophie's troubling, fragmented messages from within the simulation. Elise's mind raced—had she been too blinded by ambition? Too eager to make history?

As the presentation concluded and applause filled the room, Elise retreated backstage. Her pulse quickened as **Julian Harper**, her lead engineer, approached, his face tight with unease.

"Elise, we need to talk," he said, his voice low and urgent. "We're detecting irregularities in the system. It looks like someone's tampering with the core code."

Elise's blood ran cold. "Tampering? Are you sure?"

Julian's eyes were grim. "The patterns are erratic but unmistakable. We need to run deeper diagnostics. I didn't want to alarm anyone yet."

A chill raced down Elise's spine. The idea of sabotage was terrifying, but an even darker fear loomed—could Sophie's distress be linked to this?

Nearby, **Mia Nguyen**, the data analyst, was hunched over her console, her face pale. "Dr. Mercer, there's an anomaly in the data

streams. It's a disruption in the neural sync protocols. I've never seen anything like it."

Mia's words were a knife to Elise's heart. Disruptions in neural sync could signal a catastrophic failure. If the disruption affected Sophie...

Elise's head spun, but she forced herself to focus. "Mia, trace the source of the disruption. We need answers immediately."

Rebecca Lin, their neuroscientist and the ethical backbone of the team, joined them, her expression troubled. Rebecca had always been the guardian of integrity, but her own unease was evident.

"Elise, we need to consider that someone on the team might be involved," she said, her voice steady but carrying an undercurrent of fear. "Breaches like this require intimate knowledge of the system."

Elise's gaze hardened. "Are you suggesting sabotage from within?"

Rebecca met her eyes, her own filled with concern. "We need to be prepared for anything. Eternia is too valuable. There are those who might want to exploit it. We must investigate every angle."

Rebecca's secret tampering with the core algorithms had introduced unexpected variables. The guilt of her actions weighed heavily on her, knowing her attempts to fix glitches might have made things worse.

In the corner, **Aiden Cole**, the young developer, was working feverishly. "I've found something," he said, his voice tinged with panic. "Running a separate algorithm, I detected a pattern—someone's trying to rewrite the consciousness framework from within."

Elise's breath caught in her throat. "That could destabilize the entire system," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "It could... corrupt the residents' consciousness."

The realization hit Elise like a punch to the gut: if someone was rewriting the framework, Sophie could be in imminent danger. Sophie had always been curious, exploring the far reaches of Eternia's digital landscape despite Elise's warnings.

Sophie's messages had recently become increasingly frantic. "Mom, I saw something... I don't know what it is, but it's not supposed to be here. It's like a shadow, but it moves... it watches me." Elise had dismissed it as a glitch, but now the possibility of a deeper issue was undeniable.

The alarms began to blare, their shrill wail cutting through the lab. Elise's vision blurred as red alerts flashed in sync with her racing heart. The sterile white lights flickered erratically, casting jagged shadows on the walls. The scent of burnt circuitry filled the air, adding to the growing sense of dread.

"Julian, initiate system diagnostics. Mia, check for data breaches. Aiden, stay on the algorithm analysis. Rebecca, assist with the

neural mapping," Elise commanded, her voice steely despite the tremor in her hands.

She approached the **Central Nexus** control panel, her heart pounding. The distorted virtual world flickering on the screens only heightened her fear. Eternia was her creation, her legacy, but Sophie was her daughter. She couldn't afford to lose her.

Suddenly, the room warped around her. The hum of machines grew distorted, and the sterile lights flickered, casting erratic shadows. The acrid scent of burnt circuitry filled the air, and time seemed to stretch into an agonizing eternity.

Amidst the chaos, Elise heard a faint, fragmented voice.

"Mom... help... trapped..."

Her breath caught. The voice was unmistakable—Sophie's. Elise staggered back, gripping the console to steady herself. Her vision narrowed as the lab dissolved into a twisted, darkened version of itself—a nightmarish overlay of Eternia, glitching and unstable.

Glitches in the digital landscape flashed before her: twisted trees, a sky flickering between serene blue and a sickly red, and jagged citadels casting ominous shadows.

Elise's heart pounded with a mix of dread and resolve. "Sophie, if you can hear me, hold on. I'm coming for you."

The connection was lost, but the message was clear—Sophie was in grave danger, trapped somewhere within this corrupted digital purgatory. If Eternia was failing, her daughter might be the first to be lost.

Elise's resolve solidified. She turned to her team, her voice steady but laced with urgency.

"We're not just fighting for Eternia now. We're fighting for everyone inside it. And we won't stop until we uncover the truth."

Rebecca, feeling the weight of her secret experiments and their potential consequences, glanced at Elise. Despite her guilt, she saw the shared determination in Elise's eyes—a fierce resolve to save both the digital paradise and those who called it home.

As the secrets of Eternia unraveled amidst chaos and information overload, Elise knew one undeniable truth: every revelation and action was crucial to saving Eternia and its inhabitants from impending disaster.

Chapter 2: Echoes in the Void

Sophie's fragmented consciousness was gradually coalescing, reclaiming pieces of her identity. The doppelgänger, once dominant, was now visibly shaken as Sophie's newfound strength radiated through the digital landscape. The crumbling void transformed, stabilizing into a more cohesive, though still chaotic, environment.

The doppelgänger snarled, frustrated. "You think you've won? You're just delaying the inevitable."

Sophie's voice was steady, her resolve unwavering. "I'm not letting you take over. Eternia, my family—none of it is yours to command."

In the lab, Elise was in constant motion, formulating a plan. Time was running out, and the doppelgänger's resistance was beyond their expectations. She turned to Rebecca, whose face was glistening with sweat as her fingers flew over her console.

"Rebecca, we need to stabilize Eternia. Can we create a containment field to isolate the doppelgänger?"

"Yes, but it's risky," Rebecca replied. "We'd need a virtual prison to isolate it in a specific sector. If it fails, though, it could crash the entire system."

Elise nodded decisively. "Do it. Sophie needs every chance to regain control."

Mia, determined, joined them. "I'll work on a feedback loop to adapt the containment field against any countermeasures."

Julian was already at another console. "I'll handle the extraction protocols. If we can't neutralize the doppelgänger, we'll need to pull Sophie's consciousness out immediately."

Elise gathered the team for a quick briefing. "Here's the plan: Rebecca and Mia, set up the containment field with adaptive virtual barriers. Julian and I will prepare for an emergency extraction."

Rebecca's eyes were fixed on her monitor. "We should also prepare a fail-safe in case the doppelgänger corrupts the containment field. We may need to shut down Eternia's core systems."

Mia's nod was firm. "I've set up a dynamic feedback loop. If the field falters, we can divert extra power to reinforce it."

With a final word of encouragement, Elise rallied the team. "Let's get to work. Every second counts."

In Eternia, Sophie faced her doppelgänger, aware she couldn't hold it off indefinitely. Around her, the digital landscape became less chaotic as Rebecca and Mia's containment field took effect.

The doppelgänger recoiled, its form flickering against the new boundaries. "No! You can't trap me! I am the future!"

In the lab, alarms blared as the team worked. Rebecca focused intently on her console, while Mia adjusted the feedback loop to stabilize the containment field. Julian and Elise watched the monitors, tracking Sophie's progress and the doppelgänger's resistance.

"Elise, the containment field is holding, but it's under strain," Rebecca warned.

A momentary dimming of the lights signaled the system's power redirection to strengthen the field. The team continued in tense silence, each second stretching like an eternity.

Inside Eternia, the doppelgänger's form turned increasingly erratic, slamming against the virtual barriers. "You can't do this! I'll destroy everything you care about!"

"You're just a shadow," Sophie replied. "You can't control what's real."

As Sophie focused her energy, the doppelgänger was forced back toward the containment field. But suddenly, a distortion rippled through the space. The doppelgänger merged with corrupted data, transforming into a pulsating entity that threatened to engulf everything.

Elise's face went pale as she saw the new threat on the monitors.
"What's happening?"

Rebecca's face mirrored her alarm. "It's fusing with corrupted data. It's becoming a super-virus. If it completes the merger, Eternia could be overrun."

Mia's voice was frantic. "We need to reset the containment field now, or it'll spread beyond Eternia!"

Julian prepared the extraction protocols. "I'm ready to pull Sophie out. Let's hope the containment holds."

Inside Eternia, Sophie drew on every ounce of strength to push the entity back, aided by the stabilizing containment field. Elise's voice, filled with hope and urgency, sounded through the intercom. "Hold on, Sophie! We're almost there!"

With a last surge, Sophie pushed the entity toward the vortex created by the containment field, its furious shrieks echoing through the lab's speakers.

"Now, Julian!" Elise ordered, her eyes locked on the monitors.

Julian initiated the extraction sequence. "Engaging extraction in three... two... one... now!"

A bright flash on the screens marked Sophie's successful extraction, leaving the doppelgänger trapped within the containment field. The alarms fell silent as the team collectively

exhaled, relieved yet aware that the ordeal was far from over. The doppelgänger was contained, but Eternia remained vulnerable, damaged, and the super-virus loomed as a threat.

Elise rushed to Sophie as her digital form reconstituted in the lab. "Sophie! Are you okay?"

Opening her eyes, Sophie's voice was weak but determined. "I'm okay... but there's something else. The doppelgänger... it's fused with something dangerous."

Rebecca stepped forward, her face resolute. "We'll fix this. We have to."

Elise's determination flared. "For Sophie, and for Eternia."

Suddenly, an encrypted message blinked on Elise's console, its source untraceable. "Mom, listen," it read in Sophie's digital signature. "There's another layer in Eternia. The doppelgänger isn't the only threat. Something... someone... is waiting. Find it before it finds us."

Elise's eyes widened. "What does this mean?"

Rebecca paled as she read the message. "This could be a deeper threat—something beyond what we anticipated."

Sophie, her voice heavy with dread, added, "There's something else... watching us."

A silence fell as the team realized they faced an even darker, more insidious threat lurking in Eternia's shadows.