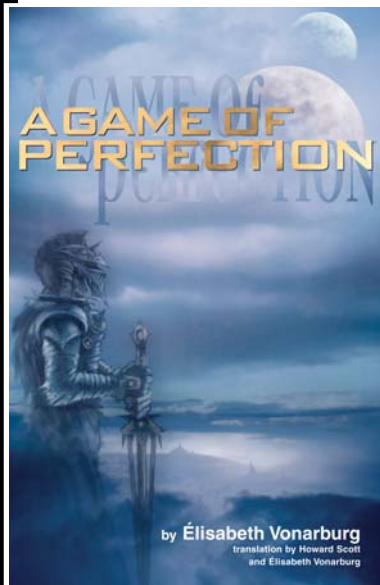


**NEW RELEASE**

**A Game of Perfection**



A Game of Perfection  
**ABOUT THE NOVEL**

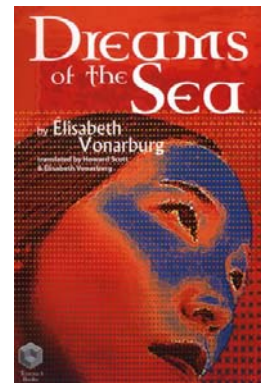
**A Game of Perfection**

Part Two of the Tyranaël series

by Élisabeth Vonarburg

A Game of Perfection is the English translation of the long awaited second volume of Élisabeth Vonarburg's Tyranaël series.

Book One, Dreams of the Sea (which was nominated for several awards including ForeWord Magazine's coveted Book of the Year award) sets the stage for the saga by introducing the Ailmãdzi (Dreamers), Eilai (an Ancient Dreamer) and the Earth colonists who establish a new settlement on Tyranaël, a planet they've named Virginia.



In Book Two, *A Game of Perfection*, the reader meets the next generation of those who live on the planet, and the saga continues as told through the telepathic eyes of Simon, who not only dreams, but also has the ability to "read" the memory plates of other Dreamers.

In typical Vonarburg style, *A Game of Perfection* weaves together exquisite visual imagery, and a multitude of plot twists and turns which lead the reader to explore the greatest adventure of all – reality!

"Vonarburg always takes on great themes, planetwide, culturewide, cosmoswide. Deserted cities and vanished civilizations are some of her recurring tropes and, in a sense, a finished novel is a city deserted by the living author, an artifact awaiting rediscovery and re-habitation by a new Dreamer." - Kathleen Ann Goonan, author and reviewer

"... a powerful rendering of story as dream and of dream as story. I often felt I was hearing echoes of Ursula K. LeGuin's felicitous touch with a descriptive phrase." - Matthew Hughes, author and reviewer

**A Game of Perfection** by Élisabeth Vonarburg

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**BIOGRAPHY**

A Game of Perfection  
**ABOUT  
THE AUTHOR**



**Élisabeth Vonarburg**

## **Élisabeth Vonarburg**

Élisabeth Vonarburg is considered one of Canada's most accomplished Science Fiction writers.

Born in France in 1947, she immigrated to Canada in 1973 and taught French Literature and Writing at various universities in Quebec.

More recently, she has been actively involved in the speculative fiction community as a translator, convention organizer, literary editor, and writer. Her novels include *Dreams of the Sea*, *The Silent City*, *Reluctant Voyagers*, *The Slow Engines of Time* and *In the Mothers' Land* (published as *The Maërlande Chronicles*), the latter winning the Philip K. Dick Special Award in 1993.

She has also received over thirty literary awards in France, Canada, and the US, including the 1998 Prix du Conseil québécois de la Femme en littérature, a one-time literary award given by the Quebecois Council for Women's Affairs on its twentieth anniversary.

Her five book series *Tyranaël*, received three major awards in Quebec: *A Game of Perfection* is the English translation of the second book in the acclaimed series.

### **Praise for Élisabeth Vonarburg's previous work**

"... a powerful rendering of story as dream and of dream as story. I often felt I was hearing echoes of Ursula K. LeGuin's felicitous touch with a descriptive phrase."

- Matthew Hughes, author and reviewer

"Vonarburg always takes on great themes, planetwide, culturewide, cosmoswide. Deserted cities and vanished civilizations are some of her recurring tropes and, in a sense, a finished novel is a city deserted by the living author, an artifact awaiting rediscovery and re-habitation by a new Dreamer." - Kathleen Ann Goonan, author and reviewer

Previous EDGE/TESSERACT novels include: *Dreams of the Sea* (Tesseract, 2003) finalist 2004 Book of the Year Award, *The Slow Engines of Time* (Tesseract, 2000), *The Silent City* (Tesseract, 1988), *Tesseracts Q* (Tesseract, 1996), *Reluctant Voyagers* (Tesseract, 1995), Nominated for the 1995 Philip K. Dick Award, *The Maërlande Chronicles* (Tesseract, 1992) Winner of the 1993 Philip K. Dick Special Award

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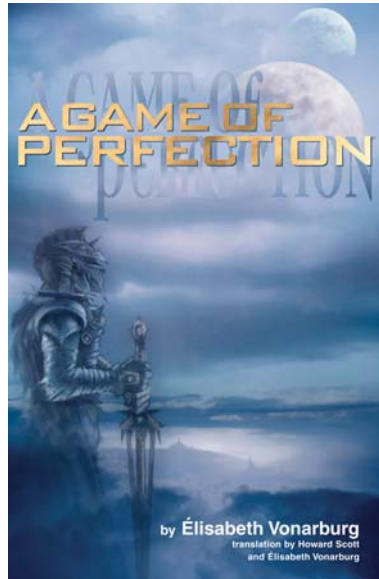
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**EDGE**

## A Game of Perfection

Élisabeth Vonarburg



### Testimonials:

CURRENT and PREVIOUS TESTIMONIALS for VONARBURG's WORK

[A] glorious, lush, novel, very dreamlike indeed. - **Nalo Hopkinson**  
 re: Dreams of the Sea

I often felt I was hearing echoes of Ursula K. LeGuin's felicitous touch with a descriptive phrase. - **Matt Hughes** re: Dreams of the Sea

Vonarburg always takes on great themes, planetwide, culturewide, cosmoswide. Deserted cities and vanished civilizations are some of her recurring tropes and, in a sense, a finished novel is a city deserted by the living author, an artifact awaiting rediscovery and re-habitation by a new Dreamer. - **Kathleen Ann Goonan** re: Dreams of the Sea

Ms. Vonarburg deserves the highest marks for pulling off this ambitious attempt at telling a dual time-line, highly detailed, sensitive, SF character study of two societies: one set in distant past, a gentle verisimilitude of mankind but with a vivid, detailed, alien culture; the other, a more familiar rendering of man, struggling to understand and tame a foreign world. - **Ralph Briggs** re: Dreams of the Sea

Informed with a maturity of feeling seldom encountered in science fiction, a metamorphic journey into disturbing possibilities of gender, social order and genetic science - **William Gibson** re: *The Silent City*

Vonarburg writes with a deft and gentle touch (...) - **Megan Lindholm** re: *The Silent City*

A densely packed book, full of fine detail and clearly drawn characters. The story line is complex but moves briskly and is packed with twists that are at once surprising and logical. - **Vancouver Sun**, re: *The Silent City*

The novel is one of the more sensitive explorations of gender and identity since *The Left Hand of Darkness* (...) a haunting, evocative tone. - **Locus** - Gary K. Wolfe

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An exciting, demanding, satisfying thought-experiment - serious science fiction doing what only science fiction can do.- **Ursula Le Guin** - re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

Vonarburg's work has a seriousness of purpose that much American science fiction, even some of the best, lacks; moral issues and intellectual debates are an important and exciting part of her novels (...) Elisabeth Vonarburg has embarked on an imaginative inquiry with intelligence and art (...) She has succeeded in creating a memorable addition to the body of sociological science fiction.- **Pamela Sargent** - re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

A richly structured and plotted novel of ideas in which speculation and fabulation are inextricably linked. (...) Because the physical details of the novel's environment are so vividly rendered and the characters so beautifully developed, we are happy to absorb the stimulating intellectual speculation (...) - **New York Review of Science Fiction** - Joan Gordon re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

Elisabeth Vonarburg is a formidable writer (...) thoughtful science fiction dealing with the human heart and mind. - **Julian May** re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

Fascinating... a real treasure, a meticulously created society. - **Marion Zimmer Bradley**, re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

..sinuous, highly sensuous prose, with a leisurely, grainy attention to sensory wonders (...) a work of impressive subtlety and rigor (...) - **Washington Post**, Gregory Feeley, re: *The Maërlande Chronicles*

The lovely, layered worlds Vonarburg presents are like a shifting kaleidoscope wrought of dream and the very human urge to journey toward reality's core. The book lives in details, slowly, richly (...) worth the reading and deeply science-fictional. - **Kathleen Ann Goonan** re: *Slow Engines of Time*

This strong collection reveals Vonarburg to be an important albeit unacknowledged part of the cyberpunk revolution - **Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine**, Paul Di Filippo re: *Slow Engines of Time*

"Language is both the worst and the best of things for French-speaking science fiction writers. It prevents them from participating in and contributing to the great world of American science fiction, yet it allows them to develop an original perspective, a voice that is their own." - foreword to *Tesseract's* by Elisabeth Vonarburg

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# RECOGNITION

PHOTO BY NANCY VICKERS



# Awards

## Awards

Prix Dagon 1978, Québec, Best SF Story of the Year, "L'oeil de la nuit".  
Prix de la Centrale des Bibliothèques de prêt du Saguenay-Lac St-Jean, 1981, Québec, L'Oeil de la nuit.  
Prix Boréal 1980, Québec, Best non-fiction.  
Prix Boréal 1981, idem.  
Grand Prix de la SF française, Prix Rosny Aîné, France, Prix Boréal 1982, Québec, Best SF Novel, 1982, Le Silence de la Cité ; the English translation was a final nominee for the Canadian Casper Award, now Aurora Award, in 1989.  
Troph'art en Littérature 1985, Saguenay-Lac St-Jean, Québec, also a final nominee for the Grand Prix de la SF et du Fantastique Québécois, 1985, Janus.  
Casper Award, Canada, Best SF Short Story in French, 1987, "La carte du Tendre".  
Casper Award, idem, 1990, "Cogito".  
Aurora Award, previously Casper Award, Canada, Best Short Story in French, 1991, "Ici, des Tigres".  
Aurora Award, Canada, Best Book SF/F in French, 1991, Histoire de la Princesse et du Dragon.  
Aurora Award, Canada, Best Book SF/F in French, 1992, Ailleurs et au Japon.  
Nominee Grand Prix Logidec de la SF & du Fantastique Québécois 1992, Québec, Ailleurs et au Japon.  
Nominee Grands Prix Culturels du Saguenay/Lac St-Jean 1992, Best Fiction, Québec, Ailleurs et au Japon.  
Nominee James Tiptree Award, 1993, USA, In the Mothers' Land.  
Prix spécial du Jury (Runner-up) Philip K. Dick Award, 1993, USA, In the Mothers' Land.  
Aurora Award, Canada, Best Novel in French, 1993 Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Grand Prix Logidec, 1993, Québec, Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Prix Création du Gala du Salon du Livre du Saguenay/Lac St.-Jean, Québec, 1993, Best Novel, Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Nominee Prix Méritas de la Centrale des Bibliothèques de prêt du Saguenay/Lac St.-Jean, Québec, Best Novel, 1993, Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Nominee Prix Rosny Aîné 1993, France, Best Novel, Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Prix Boréal 1993, Québec, Best Novel, Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Prix Boréal 1993, Québec, Best non-fiction of the year.  
Nominee Prix Brives-Montréal 1995, France, Contes de Tyranaël.  
Nominee Prix St-Exupéry Valeurs Jeunesse 1995, France, Les Contes de la Chatte Rouge.  
Prix Boréal 1995, Québec, Best non-fiction.  
Nominee du Philip K. Dick Award 1995, USA, Reluctant Voyageurs.  
Nominee for the Dublin International Award 1996 Chroniques du Pays des Mères.  
Aurora Award 1996, Canada, Best Book in French, Les Voyageurs malgré eux.  
Grand Prix de la SF et du Fantastique québécois 1997, Tyranaël 1 & 2, et "Le début du cercle".  
Prix Gala du Livre SLSJ 1997, Québec, Best Fiction Tyranaël 1, 2 et 3.  
Prix Boréal 1997, Québec, Best Novel, Tyranaël 1, Les Rêves de la Mer.  
Prix Boréal 1997, Québec, Best Novella, "Le début du cercle".  
Babet d'or, France, Saint-Étienne's Book Fair, 1997, Tyranaël 1, 2 et 3.  
Prix "Femme et littérature" du Conseil Québécois du Statut de la Femme, 1998. (A one time award given by the Quebecois Council on Women Affairs)

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# SCIENCE FICTION WEEKLY

THE WEB'S #1 SOURCE FOR NEWS, REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

## A Game of Perfection

**Mutant children on a distant world hold the key  
to solving the mystery of an extinct alien race**

*A Game of Perfection*

By *Élisabeth Vonarburg*

*Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing* <<http://www.edgewebsite.com>>

*Trade Paperback, April 2006*

*339 pages*

*ISBN 978-1-894063-32-6*

*MSRP: \$16.95*

Reviewed by Paul Di Filippo

The planet once known to its extinct natives as Tyranaël (and to its human settlers as Virginia) is a world of enigmas, both natural and sentient-made. A weird blue liquid-like substance manifests from nowhere when astronomical conditions are right, flowing over coastal regions and disrupting the actual transmission of electricity. The animals of Virginia—including a species very much like Earth's mythical unicorns—exhibit strange behaviors, and will not allow themselves to be approached. And even after 200 years of human habitation, no one knows where the original humanoid dwellers went, why they went, or much about their culture. But there are plenty of artifacts left behind, including a large number of towering pylons. And when these pylons flare with unknown energy one day, they unleash a generation of mutants among the humans.

Vonarburg has layered in literally dozens of allusions in her rich cake of a book.

The most powerful mutant (they have variable talents) proves to be a boy named Simon Rossem. He grows up to found a hidden network of mutants, who must shield their very existence from society's fears and reprisals. Then, in early old age, he apparently dies, only to be reborn with a youthful physiology under an old man's façade. We encounter Simon at the start of this volume when he's nearly 150 years old, having gone through many serial aliases to preserve his secret identity. Although weary and lonely, he's still seeking out the new generations of mutants and shepherding them to maturity. He does so with one named Tessa, one named Michael, and finally one named Martin, each of whom needs specific care and instruction.

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Meanwhile, the mutants are learning to telepathically read the “dream plates” left behind by the natives, discovering more and more about their adopted world. They feel confident eventually in taking over the planetary government, acting as an elite behind the scenes. But all their plans will be for naught if they cannot fight off a surprise invasion from Earth.

Children of wonder, led by an immortal

This book is the second in a five-part series that originally debuted in French-language editions back in the 1990s. (Vonarburg is one of Canada’s leading SF writers.) Only now are English-language readers privileged to experience this fine series. (And, search as I might, I could not find a credit for any translator, unless it be Vonarburg herself. In any case, the English text is eminently readable, preserving what I assume are the original elegances.) The first volume was *Dreams of the Sea* (2004), whose contents are summarized in a handy prologue in this entry.

I’ve commented before that a book can be entirely original and still summon up echoes of many predecessors. Such resonances, in my view, make for the richest reading experience. And Vonarburg has layered in literally dozens of allusions in her rich cake of a book.

Her mutants on the run are the latest in a long line extending back to van Vogt’s *Slans*, Kuttner’s *Baldies* and Shiras’ children of the atom. There’s a touch of Heinlein here as well, with Simon coming off as a bit of a Lazarus Long figure. (Roger Zelazny is also namechecked in the text, quite fittingly for someone who loved these long-lived loners.) The enigmas of the planet called Virginia summon up allied strangenesses from Gene Wolfe, Michael Bishop and Brian Aldiss. The way in which the humans are being shaped by their new world, where the ghosts of the natives exert a pervasive influence, strikes the same sparks as the history of Bradbury’s Mars. Then there’s an angle that looks like homage, due to the delayed publishing history of the books, but is really precedence. Vonarburg’s depiction of the political realities of her society, of the underclasses and their struggle for social justice, reads like something out of Ken MacLeod or China Miéville. (I’m thinking of one typical scene where Simon checks out the radical newspapers of the ghetto.) This social awareness is a strong thread throughout.

But Vonarburg is equally concerned with individualizing her characters, deepening their portraits for us, and with world-building. Her inventive naming of the flora and fauna of Virginia, her intimate knowledge of the planet’s geography, conduces toward a rich experience for the reader. And in the unique ways that Simon encounters and interacts with his varied proteges, we see that merely being a mutant does not mean a sameness of personality. Individualism overrides the shared destiny.

With this series, Vonarburg is well on her way to creating a landmark for the genre.

Edge Publishing has a tremendous backlist of high-quality titles, available in both hardback and paperback. By all means, check them out. In fact, I believe the NAFTA trade pact mandates that all U.S. readers buy at least three! —Paul

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# NEW YORK REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

May 2006

## ***A Game of Perfection* by Élisabeth Vonarburg**

Calgary, Alberta: Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2005; US\$16.95/C\$20.95 tpb; 339 pages

reviewed by Ursula Pflug

Quebec writer Élisabeth Vonarburg is not as well known as many of her Anglo-Canadian compatriots, in spite of having published a great many award winning novels, including *The Silent City*, *Reluctant Voyagers* and the three volume series, *The Maërlande Chronicles*, winner of the Philip K. Dick special award in 1993. Her books are published in Quebec and in France before they see English translation.

Quebec has a flourishing literary culture. Vonarburg is an icon of the French sf scene, not just as a writer but as a translator, editor (*Solaris*) and convention organizer (Boreal) as well. Hopefully, the English translation (by Vonarburg and Howard Scott) of *Tyranaël* will bring her work to a wider audience. The five book series, of which *Dreams of the Sea* is the first, and *A Game Of Perfection* the second, has won three major prizes in Quebec.

*A Game of Perfection* continues the epic saga of the planet Tyranaël, or Virginia as it has been renamed. Colonists from Earth were marooned on the planet after the appearance of a strange electromagnetic phenomenon called The Sea, which disabled communications. These first settlers move into beautifully described native cities, now mysteriously abandoned. Over time, successive waves of colonists, corporations and arms of government arrive from Earth to plunder the planet's resources and meddle with the Old Settlers' lives.

*A Game of Perfection* follows Simon, an autistic boy who is changed forever by a visit to a forbidden island where secrets of the ancients are kept behind a kind of force-shield barrier. Gradually, he learns his autism is actually a survival mechanism in a world where multitudinous impressions threaten to overwhelm the sensitive. He also learns how to create psychic barriers, so that he may navigate more smoothly through life. As an adult, he dedicates himself to finding other sensitives, training them, and setting up complicated networks of underground support for these "new children." No one knows why sensitives are appearing in legion numbers, largely keeping secret their paranormal powers, which include telepathy, telepresence, and psychokinesis.

There's plenty of politics, as the eventually organized (and adult) psychics aim to infiltrate and then subvert the independence party.

They see the possibility of altering this party's aims to include that of convincing the general population that not only do large numbers of their kind exist, but that they are no threat.

Or are they?

Vonarburg doesn't write space opera; this is largely a psychological novel. *A Game of Perfection's* intense poignancy stems from Simon and Martin's hauntingly described loneliness, a side effect of the need to keep secrets during a covert operation and the concomitant lack of trust between individuals who need one another most. It is also a meditation on the various forms of altruism. Lastly, or firstly, for the opening scene depicts them, it is about unicorns. Yes, unicorns.

Vonarburg dreamt the story at fifteen, and she has been writing and rewriting it in the thirty years since. Indeed, *A Game of Perfection* reads as if we are watching a strangely beautiful, epic dream, or as if we too have opened one of the holographic memory plates of the ancients. If I have a criticism, it is that even the most dramatic events are something we see unfold, rather than feel being wrenched from within as a punchier style might facilitate. However, it is also this poetic observational prose which buttresses the dreamlike quality of the series.

The most obvious comparison that comes to mind is to that perennial staple of high school English curriculums, John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* (U. S. title, *Re-birth*). However, Vonarburg's narrative is more properly reminiscent of Ursula K. Le Guin's in her themes of culture, of archeology, and of a kind of living anthropology in which the present inhabitants of Tyranaël eventually learn so much about the ancients they begin to become them. I was also reminded of Maureen McHugh's ability to paint with veracity the day-to-day struggles of human beings who need not live on an "offshore" planet for us to care about them, but do and are more interesting because of it. What makes Vonarburg distinctive is her ability to make the reader feel he is exploring not a novel but a nautilus shell. Just when we think we know what's going on, another gorgeous, mysterious chamber opens up, not displacing but augmenting the previous one. ▲

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*Ursula Pflug lives in Norwood, Ontario.*

22 The New York Review of Science Fiction May 2006

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# A Game Of Perfection

by Élisabeth Vonarburg



REVIEWED by KELLY MCMANUS

Quebec author Elisabeth Vonarburg's *A Game of Perfection* is the second instalment in the *Tyranael* series, the ambitious, multigenerational epic about Earth's third intergalactic colony on the planet *Tyranael*. The novel, the English translation of a French text, explores telepathy as the next "mutation" in human evolution. And it features a nostalgic revival of "archaic technologies" such as "steam, compressed air, natural gas, dirigibles."

In the first book, we learned that *Tyranael* was mysteriously deserted by its humanoid natives centuries before the arrival of the first settlers from Earth. Every two years, the planet becomes partially covered by a mysterious substance called "The Sea." The Sea is not water: It eats all organic material and disables most electric and electronic devices. In the meantime, relics left by the natives

seem connected somehow to *The Sea* and to the handful of the colonists showing telepathic "mutations." But how will the "normals" treat these mutants? Will they see them as a threat?

Book two is about the secretive political machinations of the growing telepath "networks," plus their efforts to learn more about *Tyranael*'s past. Vonarburg has speculated about mutations in the human genome before. Her *Maerlande Chronicles* (1993), a story about post-apocalyptic matriarch societies, won the Philip K. Dick Special Award. But *A Game of Perfection* falls short of the imaginative, complex, well-executed *Chronicles*. The sheer scope of the plot is just too ambitious. Vonarburg also introduces too many "main" characters. The scenarios are interesting, in theory, but the writing is neither artful nor compelling.

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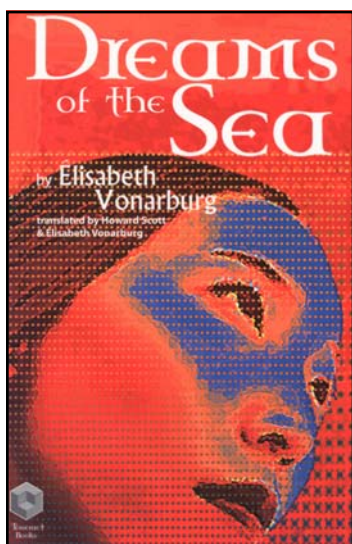
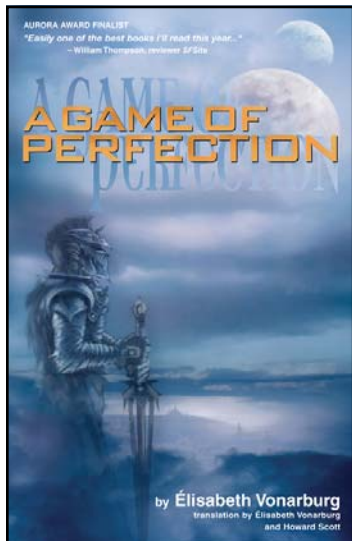
# Yet Another Book Review Site Review

## A GAME OF PERFECTION

Book Two of the Tyranael Series

Elisabeth Vonarburg

EDGE Science Fiction  
and Fantasy Publishing



Years and generations are passing and the inhabitants of Tyranael (Virginia in their own eyes) are settling into the rhythms of their adopted planet. The mysterious sea that comes and goes claiming organic life in its path, is not yet understood, but is respected and planned for. Indigenous life is studied and cities abandoned by the “Ancients” have been re-occupied as humans spread across the land.

Amongst the planet-born, a mutation is appearing irregularly: people who are “sensitives” or having some form of telepathic powers. Simon, a mysterious old man who has lived and been reborn (after a strange experience in his youth), dedicates his life to finding these gifted people and fostering them into a supportive cell of like born types...yet never revealing his own gifts in this area and never staying long enough for them to grow dependent upon him. Over time, this cell grows political aspirations and social agendas that don't mesh well with their overlords from Earth. As tensions mount, internal divisions appear too as personalities clash. One man, Martin, knows more than the rest. He was granted some of Simon's confidence, having an inkling of the man's awesome telepathic potential and will. But, where is Simon - or whatever name he is going by - now, when he is needed the most?

This is a great character and plot driven story, sure to appeal to the discriminating SF reader. Ms. Vonarburg creates wonderfully three dimensional characters, resplendent with all their hopes, aspirations, fears, desires and foibles and then moves them about her vividly realized, alien landscape. Plotlines are emotive, drawing the reader deeper and deeper into the political and social intrigues of this world removed from the familiar Earth. Although not fast paced in an action sense, Ms. Vonarburg sprinkles enough mystery from the planet's past inhabitants to keep the mix exotic. I look forward to the next book in the series. - R. F. Briggs

**A Game of Perfection** by Elisabeth Vonarburg

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# A Game Of Perfection

by Élisabeth Vonarburg

REVIEWED by Donna McMahon

A GAME OF PERFECTION is the sequel to Elizabeth Vonarburg's DREAMS OF THE SEA (also published by Tesseract/Edge), and the second in her Tyranael trilogy.

In DREAMS OF THE SEA, an accident stranded human colonists on a planet they named Virginia, and the few survivors had to struggle to live until the next colony ship arrived. A GAME OF PERFECTION opens much later, after the active colonization of Virginia is over and millions of humans have been living on the planet all their lives.

But they still have not solved the mystery of what happened to the alien race that inhabited the planet centuries before and then suddenly disappeared, leaving all their cities intact as if everybody had just stood up and walked away. The government, anxious to maintain tight control and uncomfortable with mystery, discourages speculation about aliens. Through a "scientific" agency called CEXSAR, they are more interested in investigating a troubling new phenomenon—humans who are being born with telepathic skills.

Simon knows all about this because he was the first powerful telepath. Following a strange encounter with an alien artifact, he found himself possessed of the ability to sense normal people's thoughts—and even manipulate them. He has spent his unnaturally long life searching for other telepaths and trying to keep their existence a secret from 'normals' who want to eradicate

them. Every generation there are more telepathic mutations, but when will it be safe for them to come out of hiding?

Although the setting is the same as in DREAMS OF THE SEA, and at least one character reappears, this novel is considerably more accessible to the average genre reader than its predecessor. There are still many characters to keep track of and Vonarburg is inordinately fond of long internal musings and cryptic flashbacks, however Simon's compelling, lonely journey forms a focal point for the book, keeping the story knitted together and the reader engaged.

Vonarburg's plot is very reminiscent of Van Vogt's SLAN, although greatly more sophisticated in its execution. And the complex, atmospheric setting adds a great deal of texture. The human story is always overshadowed by the mysterious influence of a vanished alien race on a planet that is not Earth and does not welcome human beings.

Still, Vonarburg's books are not for the hard SF enthusiast. She largely ignores scientific or technological details of her universe in favour of focusing on broad philosophical and ethical questions about what it means to be human. And her writing, which is sedate and rich in imagery, is likely to appeal to the more literary reader.

A GAME OF PERFECTION was translated from the original French by Vonarburg and Howard Scott, and the Edge edition is complemented by a lovely, atmospheric cover by David Willicome.

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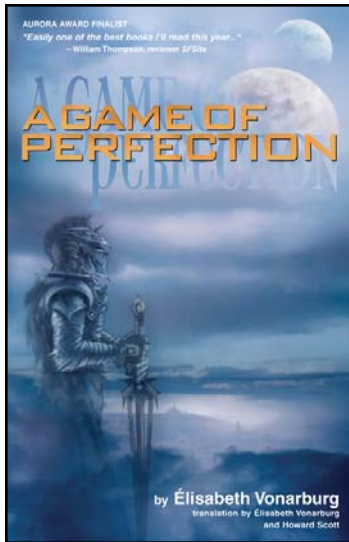
# A Game Of Perfection

by **Élisabeth Vonarburg**

*EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing*

\$20.95 Cdn. Trade Paperback - 339 pages - ISBN: 978-1-894063-32-6

**Review by Ursula Pflug - January 7, 2006 in The Peterborough Examiner**



Second in the five part Tyranaël series, which began with *Dreams Of The Sea*, *A Game Of Perfection* continues the epic saga of the planet Tyranaël or Virginia as it has been renamed. Colonists from Earth were marooned on the planet after the appearance of a strange electromag-

netic phenomenon called *The Sea*, disabling communications. These first settlers move into beautifully described native cities, now mysteriously abandoned. Over time, successive waves of colonists, corporations and arms of government arrive from Earth to plunder the planets' resources and meddle with the Old Settlers' lives.

*A Game Of Perfection* follows Simon, an autistic boy who is changed forever by a visit to a forbidden island, where secrets of the ancients are kept behind a kind of force-shield barrier. Gradually he learns his autism is actually a survival mechanism in a world where multitudinous impressions threaten to overwhelm the sensitive. He also learns how to create psychic barriers, so that he may navigate more smoothly through his life, which, as an adult, he dedicates to finding other sensitives, training them, and setting up complicated networks of underground support for these

“new children.” No one knows why they are appearing in legion numbers, largely keeping secret their paranormal powers which include telepathy, telepresencing and psychokinesis.

There's plenty of politics, as the eventually organized (and adult) psychics aim to infiltrate and then subvert the independence party. They see the possibility of altering this party's aims to include that of convincing the general population that not only do vast numbers of their kind exist, but that they are no threat.

Or are they?

Vonarburg doesn't write space opera; this is largely a psychological novel. *A Game Of Perfection's* intense poignancy stems from Simon and Martin's hauntingly described loneliness, a side effect of the need to keep secrets in a covert operation, and the concomitant lack of trust between individuals who need one another most. It is also a meditation on the various forms of altruism, and lastly, or firstly, for the opening scene depicts them, it is about unicorns. Yes, unicorns.

Vonarburg dreamt the story at fifteen, and has been writing and rewriting in the thirty years since. Indeed, *A Game Of Perfection* reads as if we are watching a strangely beautiful, epic dream, or as if we too have opened one of the holographic memory plates of the ancients. If I have a critique it is that even the most dramatic events are something we see unfold, rather than being wrenched within as a punchier style might facilitate. However, it is also this poetic observational prose which buttresses the dreamlike quality of the series, a multi award winner in its original French.

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The most obvious comparison which will come to many readers' minds is to that perennial staple of high school English curriculums, John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*. However, Vonarburg is more properly reminiscent of Ursula K. Leguin in her themes of culture, of archeology and a kind of living anthropology in which the present inhabitants of Tyranaël eventually learn so much about the ancients they begin to become them. I was also reminded of Maureen McHugh's ability to paint with veracity the day to day struggles of human beings who need not live on an "offshore" planet for us to care about them, but do, and are more interesting because of it. What makes Vonarburg unique is her ability to make the reader feel he is exploring not a novel but a nautilus shell. Just when we think we know what's going on, another gorgeous, mysterious chamber opens up, not displacing but augmenting the previous one.

Ursula Pflug is a writer living in Norwood.

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## **A Game Of Perfection**

by **Élisabeth Vonarburg**

**Review by Douglas Barbour - Canadian Literature Magazine**

*A Game of Perfection* is the second volume of what will surely be her masterwork, *The Tyrana'1 Series*, and although it does stand alone, I'd recommend reading *Dreams of the Sea* first. In that novel, Vonarburg introduced the planet Tyrana'1. One of two planets circling Altair, Tyana'1 was once home to an Ancient race. Their many cities and artifacts seem to have been waiting for colonists from Earth to arrive and discover the enigmatic civilization long dispersed from the planet humans name Virginia. But the first expedition ran into trouble when a mysterious Sea suddenly appeared, killing any person beneath its surface. Of no substance known to Terran science, it appears and disappears twice a Virginian year. Yet, given the way humanity has nearly destroyed Earth's environment, colonization must go on. In *Dreams of the Sea*, an Ancient Dreamer narrates most of the interconnected stories, those of her own people and her visions of the colonists from Earth and their difficulties, both with the new environment of Tyrana'1 and the continuing control from Earth.

In *A Game of Perfection*, Vonarburg offers only a few slight glimpses of the Ancients, as she turns to tell a multi-generational tale of the rather fast evolution of ESP forced upon humans by the Sea and various Ancient technological artefacts. Simon Rossem, the most powerful telepath of a strongly psychic family, is central to this story of social and cultural change. A kind of hidden philosopher-king, who for some reason unknown to him keeps being re-born, he helps to form various networks of Others, to get them working for the independence of Virginia and to somehow acclimatize humanity to Tyrana'1's unique ecology. Of course, things do not work out exactly as he plans, and Vonarburg creates a multifaceted collection of other players with whom he has to deal. *A Game of Perfection* is both philosophical and social SF at its best.

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# A Game of Perfection

Reviewed by Amy J. Ransom

Vonarburg, Élisabeth. *A Game of Perfection*. Trans. Howard Scott and Élisabeth Vonarburg. Edge Science Fiction & Fantasy, 2006. 330 pages, trade paper, \$16.95. ISBN 978-1-894063-32-6

Two hundred years after Earth has colonized a planet in the Altair system, a genetic mutation endows a minority of the settlers' descendants with various forms of extrasensory perception. An underground network develops to rescue "sensitive" children from abusive parents as well as from government- and corporate-sponsored research entities who covet this gift's power. The struggle for freedom, not only for the mutants themselves, but eventually for the colony from Earth's control drives Élisabeth Vonarburg's *A Game of Perfection*, the second volume in her *Tyranaël* pentalogy.

In addition to dealing with this evolution in humanity, somehow related to the planet dubbed Virginia, the colonists must also come to terms not with the presence of the "native Ancients" of *Tyranaël*, but with their very absence. The "Virginian syndrome" consists of the colonial neurosis derived from inhabiting a literal ghost town. For while the indigenous Ranao have left behind no biological trace, they abandoned intact homes, public buildings, roads, canals, and a massive system of dikes erected to protect their cities from a strange and destructive Sea of energy.

The Virginians face Otherness in a range of ways, and the mutation, the absent indigenes, and the Sea serve as enigmas to be solved. Indeed, while social, political and interpersonal conflicts fuel the story's forward momentum, the reader participates in the protagonists' epistemological quests concerning the planet and its mysteries. Foremost among these characters is a powerful telepath, the exceptionally long-lived Simon

Rossem who mentors a group of young mutants. We also experience Simon's horror as he relives his father's memory of a tragic attempt to cage the planet's unicorn-like species. We share the "normal" Virginian spectators' sense of wonder at the group's animal circus, which features up-close contact with the planet's elusive fauna. We feel with the young mutants as they view the scars of a fallen companion inflicted by his abusive father because of his difference. Vonarburg's storytelling has the power to manipulate her reader's emotions and, indeed, the series' obsession with manipulation acts precisely as a figure for the narrative act and its implication in the creation of reality. As Earth manipulates its colony planet, the colonial government manipulates the "normal" majority's knowledge of the mutation and the Ranao, while the telepaths secretly manipulate normals to support the independence movement, and Simon suspects it all to be manipulated by a higher, outside power.

The entire *Tyranaël* pentalogy's publication in Québec (1996-1997), where it reached the best-seller list, represented the culmination of a thirty-year long obsession for its author who first dreamed of an engulfing sea as an adolescent in France. Allowing such a considerable length of time for the story to mature and to work out the complexities of its universe (including consultation of an ecosystematician) has clearly paid off. For Vonarburg undertook an ambitious project in her postcolonial revision of the space colonization epic. Interweaving the threads of past and present through frames and flashbacks, Vonarburg crosses

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not only time but also space taking the Ranao to a parallel world. The work exploits the full range of SF topoï, including space travel, extraterrestrial beings, parallel universes, cyborgs, alternate/future technology and development of human powers beyond those currently known. Yet, it also deals with the problems of our own world: immigration, human rights, tolerance versus oppression of difference, exploitation of one visible minority by another hidden, power-wielding minority, and the settler colony's coming to terms with the indigenous. Vonarburg's work is of considerable scholarly interest, not only for its revisionist approach to the tropes of classic genre SF, but particularly for the nascent field of "postcolonial science fiction." Vonarburg's socially conscious, exciting, yet thoughtful depiction of Earth's colonization of another planet rivals Kim Stanley Robinson's treatment of this theme in the Mars trilogy.

My concern for this translation's success (upon which production of the remainder of the series may rest) in reaching the popular and critical audiences it merits resides in its publication by a small Canadian press. Vonarburg's reputation is firmly established in Canada and France, while a handful of articles and dissertations (there and in the U. S.) recognize the scholarly significance of her three earlier novels (all available in translation). While the complexity of its narrative structure and the nuanced unfolding of the multiple plot elements it consistently juggles (precisely those elements

which enhance its academic interest) may put off casual readers, taken as a whole Tyranaël has many of the elements necessary for generating a popular following. Like Herbert's *Dune* or Aldiss's *Helliconia* series the pentalogy offers a fully developed, other universe, peopled with compelling characters, multiple ethnic groups, languages and telekinetic powers to catalogue and compare, all rolled out over centuries on Virginia and including millennia of Rani legend. Unfortunately, U. S. readers are not going to find *A Game of Perfection* (or *Dreams of the Sea*, the series' first volume) at either of our bookstore/coffeehouse chains. Happily, the internet gives us access to such works at the click of a mouse.

Like the diligent reviewer, I tried to find some points for criticism. I wondered about a few minor aspects of the translation, but who am I to question the author's choices? (In general, her close collaboration with Howard Scott ensures that none of the work's depth, poetry or humor is lost in translation.) Although each novel can stand on its own—the background material is skillfully worked in—the major enigmas remain unsolved until the final volume, an element which may leave some readers dissatisfied at this book's closure. Looking back, I realize that this review reads more like that of a fan than that of a scholar. That is exactly how good Vonarburg's work is; it can make the jaded academic feel like a fan again, yet, it should inspire an important body of scholarly work.

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