



## The Children of the Sky (Zones of Thought series Book 3)

By Vernor Vinge



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**The Children of the Sky continues the epic scifi adventure of Hugo award-winning *A Fire Upon the Deep*!**

**“Vinge is one of the best visionary writers of SF today.” —David Brin**

Thousands of years in the future, humanity is no longer alone in a universe where a mind's potential is determined by its location in space, from superintelligent entities in the Transcend, to the limited minds of the Unthinking Depths, where only simple creatures, and technology, can function. Nobody knows what strange force partitioned space into these "regions of thought," but when the warring Straumli realm use an ancient Transcendent artifact as a weapon, they unwittingly unleash an awesome power that destroys thousands of worlds and enslaves all natural and artificial intelligence.

Ten years have passed on Tines World, and Ravna and the children have survived a war. While there is peace among the Tines, there are those among them—and among the humans—who seek power...and no matter the cost, these malcontents are determined to overturn the fledgling civilization that has taken root since the humans landed.

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**Realtime/Bobble Series**

*The Peace War*  
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**Other Novels**

*The Witling*  
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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Advance praise for *The Children of the Sky*:

“Imagine bootstrapping a fallen civilization into transcendence using nothing but a collection of hive-mind Machiavellis, a crippled hyperadvanced spaceship, and a pack of surly, scheming orphaned adolescents. Oh, and then there’s the vengeful god ramscooping itself to relativistic speeds a mere thirty light years away. Vinge’s explosive imagination and deft storytelling make epics sail past like hummingbirds—you’ll steal daytime moments to read more, and lie awake at night contemplating what you’ve read.” —Cory Doctorow, bestselling and award-winning author of *Little Brother*

“Vernor Vinge’s stories and novels have always surprised and entertained me, and *The Children of the Sky* carries on that grand tradition!” —Greg Bear, bestselling author of *Hull Zero Three*

“No one has ever crafted a more complex, fascinating, and strangely realistic alien race than Vernor Vinge’s marvelous Tines.” —David Brin, bestselling author of *The Postman* and *Startide Rising*

#### Raves for *A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge

“This is big-scale science fiction at its best.” —*The Denver Post*

“With uninterrupted pacing, suspense without contrivance, and deftly drawn aliens who can be pleasantly comical without becoming cute, Vinge offers heart-pounding, mind-expanding science fiction at its best.” —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

“There are not too many novels that leave this reader screaming violently for more. Vernor Vinge’s has done so.” —*Locus*

“When I was young and had to write my address in a school notebook, I would begin with my street and apartment number and then go on through city, county, state, country and continent in a litany of ever more grandiose place names t...

#### About the Author

**Vernor Vinge** has won five Hugo Awards, including one for each of his last three novels, *A Fire Upon the Deep* (1992), *A Deepness in the Sky* (1999), and *Rainbow’s End* (2006). Known for his rigorous hard-science approach to his science fiction, he became an iconic figure among cybernetic scientists with the publication in 1981 of his novella “True Names,” which is considered a seminal, visionary work of Internet fiction. His many books also include *Marooned in Realtime* and *The Peace War*.

Born in Waukesha, Wisconsin and raised in Central Michigan, Vinge is the son of geographers. Fascinated by science and particularly computers from an early age, he has a Ph.D. in computer science, and taught mathematics and computer science at San Diego State University for thirty years. He has gained a great deal of attention both here and abroad for his theory of the coming machine intelligence Singularity. Sought

widely as a speaker to both business and scientific groups, he lives in San Diego, California.

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## CHAPTER 00

How do you get the attention of the richest businessperson in the world?

Vendacious had spent all his well-remembered life sucking up to royalty. He had never dreamed he would fall so low as to need a common merchant, but here he was with his only remaining servant, trying to find a street address in East Home's factory district.

This latest street was even narrower than the one they had left. Surely the world's richest would never come here!

The alley had heavy doors set on either side. At the moment, all were closed, but the place must be a crowded madness at shift change. There were posters every few feet, but these were not the advertisements they had seen elsewhere. These were demands and announcements: **WASH ALL PAWS BEFORE WORK, NO ADVANCE WAGES, EMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS AHEAD.** This last sign pointed toward a wide pair of doors at the end of the alley. It was all marvelously pompous and silly. And yet ... as he walked along, Vendacious took a long look at the crenellations above him. Surely that was plaster over wood. But if it was real stone, then this was a fortified castle hidden right in the middle of East Home commercialism. Vendacious held back, waved at his servant to proceed. Chitiratifor advanced along the alley, singing praise for his dear master. He had not quite reached the wide doors when they swung open and a hugely numerous pack emerged. It was nine or ten and it spread across their way like a sentry line. Vendacious suppressed the urge to look up at the battlements for signs of archers.

The huge pack looked at them stupidly for a moment, then spoke in loud and officious chords. "Employment work you want? Can you read?"

Chitiratifor stopped singing introductory flourishes, and replied, "Of course we can read, but we're not here for—"

The gatekeeper pack spoke right over Chitiratifor's words: "No matter. I have application forms here." Two of it trotted down the steps with scraps of paper held in their jaws. "I will explain it all to you and then you sign. Tycoon pay good. Give good housing. And one day off every tenday."

Chitiratifor bristled. "See here, my good pack. We are not seeking employment. My lord"—he gestured respectfully at Vendacious—"has come to tell the Great Tycoon of new products and opportunities."

"Paw prints to suffice if you cannot write—" The other interrupted its own speech as Chitiratifor's words finally penetrated. "Not wanting to apply for work?" It looked at them for moment, took in Chitiratifor's flashy outfit. "Yes, you are not dressed for this doorway. I should have noticed." It thought for a second. "You are in wrong place. Business visitors must visit to the Business Center. You go back five blocks and then onto the Concourse of the Great Tycoon. Wait. I get you a map." The creature didn't move, but Vendacious realized the pack was even more numerous than he had thought, extending back out of sight into the building; these Easterners tolerated the most grotesque perversions.

Chitiratifor shuffled back in Vendacious' direction, and the nearest of him hissed, "That's a two-mile walk just to get to the other side of this frigging building!"

Vendacious nodded and walked around his servant, confronting the gatekeeper directly. "We've come all the way from the West Coast to help Tycoon. We demand a courteous response, not petty delays!"

The nearest members of the gatekeeper stepped back timidly. Up close, Vendacious could hear that this was no military pack. Except at dinner parties, it probably never had killed a single living thing. In fact, the creature was so naive that it didn't really recognize the deadly anger confronting it. After a moment, it reformed its line, and said "Nevertheless, sir, I must follow my orders. Business visitors use the business entrance."

Chitiratifor was hissing murder; Vendacious waved him quiet. But Vendacious really didn't want to walk around to the official entrance—and that wasn't just a matter of convenience. He now realized that finding this entrance was a lucky accident. Woodcarver's spies were unlikely this far from home, but the fewer people who could draw a connection between Tycoon and Vendacious, the better.

He backed off courteously, out of the gatekeeper's space. This entrance would be fine if he could just talk to someone with a mind. "Perhaps your orders do not apply to me."

The gatekeeper pondered the possibility for almost five seconds. "But I think they do apply," it finally said. "Well then, while we wait for the map, perhaps you could pass on an enquiry to someone who deals with difficult problems." There were several lures Vendacious could dangle: "Tell your supervisor that his visitors bear news about the invasion from outer space."

"The what from where?"

"We have eyewitness information about the *humans*—" that provoked more blank looks. "Damn it, fellow, this is about the mantis monsters!"

\* \* \*

Mention of the mantis monsters did not produce the gatekeeper's supervisor; the fivesome who came out to see them was far higher in the chain of command than that! "Remasritlfeer" asked a few sharp questions and then waved for them to follow him. In a matter of minutes, they were past the gatekeeper and walking down carpeted corridors. Looking around, Vendacious had to hide his smiles. The interior design was a perfection of bad taste and mismatched wealth, proof of the foolishness of the newly rich. Their guide was a very different matter. Remasritlfeer was mostly slender, but there were scars on his snouts and flanks, and you could see the lines of hard muscle beneath his fur. His eyes were mostly pale yellow and not especially friendly.

It was a long walk, but their guide had very little to say. Finally, the corridor ended at a member-wide door, more like the entrance to an animal den than the office of the world's richest commoner.

Remasritlfeer opened the door and stuck a head in. "I have the outlanders, your eminence," he said

A voice came from within: "That should be 'my lord'. Today, I think 'my lord' sounds better."

"Yes, my lord." But the four of Remasritlfeer who were still in the corridor rolled their heads in exasperation.

"Well then, let's not waste my time. Have them all come in. There's plenty of room."

As Vendacious filed through the narrow doorway, he was looking in all directions without appearing to be especially interested. Gas mantle lamps were ranked near the ceiling. Vendacious thought he saw parts of a bodyguard on perches above that. Yes, the room was large, but it was crowded with—what? not the bejeweled knickknacks of the hallway. Here there were gears and gadgets and large tilted easels covered with half-finished drawings. The walls were bookcases rising so high that perches on ropes and pulleys were needed to reach the top shelves. One of Vendacious stood less than a yard from the nearest books. No great literature here. Most of the books were accounting ledgers. The ones further up looked like bound volumes of legal statutes.

The unseen speaker continued, "Come forward where I can see you all! Why in hell couldn't you use the business visitor entrance? I didn't build that throne room for nothing." This last was querulous muttering. Vendacious percolated through the jumble. Two of him came out from under a large drawing easel. The rest reached the central area a second later. He suffered a moment of confusion as Chitiratifor shuffled himself out of the way, and then he got his first glimpse of the Great Tycoon:

The pack was an ill-assorted eightsome. Vendacious had to count him twice, since the smaller members were moving around so much. At the core were four middle-aged adults. They had no noble or martial aspect whatsoever. Two of them wore the kind of green-tinted visors affected by accountants everywhere. The other two had been turning the pages of a ledger. Pretty clearly he had been counting his money or cutting expenses, or whatever it was that businesscritters did.

Tycoon cast irritated looks at Vendacious and Chitiratifor. "You claim to know about the mantis monsters. This better be good. I know lots about the mantises, so I advise against lies." He pointed a snout at

Vendacious, waving him closer.

*Treat him like royalty.* Vendacious belly-crawled two of himself closer to Tycoon. Now he had the attention of all Tycoon's members. The four small ones, puppies under two years old, had stopped their pell-mell orbiting of the accountancy four. Two hung back with the four, while two came within a couple feet of Vendacious. These pups were integrated parts of Tycoon's personality—just barely, and when they felt like it. Their mindsounds were unseemly loud. Vendacious had to force himself not to shrink back.

After a moment or two of impolite poking, Tycoon said, "So, how would you know about the mantis monsters?"

"I witnessed their starship *Oobii* descend from the sky." Vendacious used the human name of their ship. The sounds were flat and simple, alien. "I saw its lightning weapon bring down a great empire in a single afternoon."

Tycoon was nodding. Most East Coast packs took this version of Woodcarver's victory to be a fantasy. Evidently, Tycoon was not one of those. "You're saying nothing new here, fellow—though few packs know the name of the flying ship."

"I know far more than that, my lord. I speak the mantis language. I know their secrets and their plans." And he had one of their *datasets* in h...

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