

**A Readercon Committee
Recommended Reading List
For Readercon 14
July 12-14, 2002**

This imaginative-literature reading list is composed of some of the books that various members of the committee think are especially notable and deserving of greater attention, and reflects our eclectic interests. Works suitable for children are particularly prominent this year.

Ellen Brody, editor

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Ted Chiang, *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Tor, 2002

Many years ago, a writer could make a living from genre short stories, publishing in magazines and single-author collections. The economics of the field have turned against that possibility, as many readers seem interested only in novels. Ted Chiang bravely resists the trend, having published only at novella length or shorter, so anyone who neglects short fiction will miss the wonderful stories in this first collection. Chiang is not easily nailed down - every story is different, having in common only intelligence and perfect pitch for the idea being developed. "Understand" is the most convincing account ever of what superhuman intelligence might feel like from the inside. "Hell Is the Absence of God" raises the old theological questions in a *Reader's Digest*-style prose which somehow is just right. "Story of Your Life" may be the finest novella I have read in the past decade, bringing love together with the variational principle of physics in a story which the first-person narrator could tell in no other way. *Stories of Your Life and Others* contains every Chiang story so far, plus one new one. Not to be missed. *Michael Matthew*

Mark Dunn, *Ella Minnow Pea: A Progressively Lipogrammatic Epistolary Fable*, MacAdam/Cage, 2001, Anchor Books, 2002, and Methuen, 2002

This first novel by Mark Dunn chronicles, through the letters of the Minnow Pea family, the deterioration of Nollop (formerly Utopianna) - a fictional country off the coast of South Carolina and once home of Nevin Nollop, the author of the popular panagram sentence, "the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog". The country of Nollop has elevated language to a national art form, so when a letter "z" tile falls from it's hero's statue,

the leaders decide it is a message from beyond and ban its usage. But soon another letter falls and then another ...

Will Ella and her family find a way to save the language before they are unable to communicate?

Sometimes one comes across a book that is pure fun, this delightfully clever novel is just that!
Lois Powers

Jeffrey Ford, *The Portrait of Mrs. Charbuque*, Morrow, 2002

Set in last 19th century New York, a portrait artist takes on an unusual commission - to paint a Mrs. Charbuque's likeness without being able to ever see her. He must seek clues from the often incredible stories the woman tells him. Meanwhile strange deaths are occurring throughout the city ... As the mystery plagues the artist, so it does the reader - and as a fellow reader of imaginative literature, can't you just imagine the possibilities?
L.P.

Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*, Illustrations by Dave McKean, HarperCollins Children's Books, 2002, and Bloomsbury Children's, 2002

Written for children ages eight and older, *Coraline* is a splendid, scary adventure tale. Like other Brits before her who may have Used means like a looking glass or a wardrobe, our heroine enters an alternate world through an old, bricked up doorway where she meets among other people - her "other" parents.
L.P.

Margaret Hodges, *Comus*, Illustrations by Trina Schart Hyman, Holiday House, 1996

By dumb luck we were given this book the Christmas after we discovered *St. George and the Dragon* by the same author and illustrator. This is an adaptation of John Milton's masque *Comus*, which I hadn't read since my undergrad Milton class, and at first I thought it a strange choice for a children's book. But the story captivated my kids once again, and once again this was a book that they asked for night after night. Three children get lost in the woods, one is led away by *Comus* - an evil magician - and a Good Spirit helps the other two free her. Milton's emphasis on virtue, good and evil, etc. comes through this adaptation very nicely. The illustrations are again beautiful, and the page design features a block of text embedded within the 2-page illustrations so that the illustrations have the majority of the space of the book.

Amy West

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Margaret Hodges, *Saint George and the Dragon: A Golden Legend*, Illustrations by Trina Schart Hyman, Little, Brown, 1984

We discovered this book at the annual Children's Book Fair at UConn, but softcover copies were also given out at Arisia. The layout and designs of the illustrations and the text pages are beautiful and mimic a manuscript page. The story is based on Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, but told in clear, beautiful prose that often echoes the alliteration that is found throughout Spenser's verse. The author emphasizes the themes of "fearful battles and faithful loves" that are found in Spenser's text. This book quickly became the one that my 5-year-old son asked for night after night. My only quibble is with the style of George's armor, but the illustrations, and especially the dragon, are magnificent. A Caldecott medalist. A.W.

China Mieville, *The Scar*, Delrey, 2002, and Macmillan, 2002

Equally powerful and no less fascinating than its predecessor, although a bit more austere, *The Scar* is a parallel story set in same fully-realized and totally captivating dark world Mieville introduced us to in the award-winning *Perdido Street Station*. Mieville's novels make the phrase, "sense of wonder" seem somehow inadequate. L.P.

William F. Nolan, ed., *A Wilderness of Stars: Stories of Man in Conflict with Space*, Sherbourne, 1969, Gollancz, 1970, Science Fiction Book Club, 1971, and other editions

A Wilderness of Stars is a fine example of a book of short stories by various authors, from a time when multiple-author collections were much more common. It includes "Ghetto" by Poul Anderson, "Sunjammer" by Arthur C. Clarke, "The Castaway" by Charles E. Fritch, and two stories by Walter M. Miller, Jr. Various classic SF tropes and concepts are represented well, so this would be a good book to share with someone who has expressed an interest in the field. E.B.

Larry Niven and

Jerry Pournelle, *The Burning City*, Orbit, 2000, 2001, and Pocket Books, 2000, 2001

You might not expect to find these two on a Readercon reading list, but this is not just their usual adventure/romp. It's also a serious examination of issues of social decay, the nature of war and violence, class, and many other things, with quite a bit of relevance to the "metaphori-

cal treatments" part of the "Race and SF" panel. Robert van der Heide

Viktor Pelevin, *The Life of Insects*, (Originally published as *Zhizn Nasekomy* and translated from the Russian by Andrew Bromfield), Harbord Publishers, 1996, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, Penguin, 1999, and other editions

Even if one misses the intended target of Pelevin's clever parody or commentary, one can still enjoy this inventive, witty, Kafkaesque novel populated by some of most recognizably human insects that one will ever encounter. After reading the book, you may think twice before swatting that mosquito or crushing that ant ... L.P.

Robert Reed, *An Exaltation of Larks*, Tor, 1995, 1998

Reed's novel is about time travel, eternity, engineering multiple histories of the universe, and beings of nearly unlimited power. The story spans all the time and space a reader could want, setting off fireworks all the while. Side by side with that story, we get another, about life in a small college in the 1970s; this second story may have been the reason for the first. The author pulls off this odd combination most successfully. M.M.

Eric Sanvoisin, *The Ink Drinker*, (Originally published as *Le Buveur D'Encre* and translated from the French by Georges Moroz), Illustrations by Martin Matje, Delacorte Press, 1998, Dell Yearling, 2002

A young boy who doesn't like books, bored in his father's bookshop over the summer (can you imagine that?), chooses to peopewatch and log his observations into a small notebook. He soon discovers a very weird customer who opens a book, takes out a straw and starts to drink the book sucking up every printed word! "A look of absolute pleasure spread over his face, as if the book contained an ice-cream soda." To find out what happens to the young boy and the strange customer with the gray complexion and bristly eyebrows, you'll have to drink ... er ... read the book! L.P.