



The Stone That Never Came Down

John Brunner

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Europe in the 21st Century is a stricken continent. Cities crumble with neglect. Governments topple to military coups. But one man may have the answer. It is a viral drug that drastically alters the human mind, a cure for depression, unemployment, war, madness, national hatreds, prejudice, crime & mass hysteria, but there were those who wanted the cure suppressed until the world collapsed.

The Stone That Never Came Down Details

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Author : John Brunner

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From Reader Review The Stone That Never Came Down for online ebook

Sara says

Although I am a big fan of John Brunner, none of his other works have quite come up to the level of "The Sheep Look Up" or "Stand on Zanzibar." I enjoyed the setting of this novel in Europe, and the idea that was raised in the story about a specie being aware of its own evolution, but didn't find the characters particularly engaging, though some were all too accurate in their depiction of contemporary political figures.

Andy Holyer says

Discovered this on my bookshelves, and somehow I've never read it before.

Judging by the chisel mark in the top I must have bought it as a remainder.

What a discovery! Set in Kentish Town, in a Britain in severe recession (two million unemployed - remember that), severe economic crises in .. er .. Greece and Italy, potential breakdown of - OK, it's still called the Common Market, but you get the idea.

Written in 1973 (Brunner died in 1995), but despite the cassette tapes and telephones with handsets, it somehow still feels up-to-date.

A couple of slightly ropery characters - a doctor with an irritating habit of explaining the plot to the other characters, and a black TV repair man (I'd guess his style of speech might have been accurate black slang for the early 1970's but he comes over sounding like something out of Tom Sawyer), but generally brilliant.

A real find.

Raomer says

Like one said before me:

Due to the poor editing and plenty of printing errors only four stars; otherwise it could have been five!

Great story, i hope there will be a revival of John Brunners books. And really scary when you think this book is from the seventies, but it could play today.

Edwin says

It was nice to read a book again with a happy ending. You hardly ever hear about Brunner, which is a big shame, because he's such a great SF writer.

His foresight is pretty unbelievable. Super rich top class and poor class getting poorer all the time - check. EU countries getting more and more nationalistic in response to European integration - check. Riots in many EU countries - check. Christian fundamentalism getting more prominent in public discourse (Tea party like) - check. Anti gay movement - check.

Anyway - in the end it turns out alright due to the "SF part" of the story.

TS Waterman says

Brilliant story from the always prescient Brunner. Set in a near-future (from the time of writing, 1973), it outlines a world sliding into global depression, with the resulting rise in racism, class warfare, and church-supplied self-righteousness, countries defaulting from the European coalition, etc. Brunner has a recipe for a utopian solution that is bit untenable in reality, but serves well to explore the shortcomings of us humans as a rational species.

Owain Lewis says

Cute and fun, which is probably why the New Worlds critics gave Brunner such a kicking; that and the prose, which is, at best, utilitarian - my how he loves an adverb! All that aside it's a nice slice of wishful thinking and a lovely escape from the the shitstorm of current affairs. Brunner's reading of the way that late capitalism might progress is actually pretty astute but his solution, well, it's a beautiful dream but I didn't mind buying into it for 200 pages. Now give me some post-apocalyptic bleakness and I can get back to biting my nails and worrying about EVERYTHING!

Ron says

A work of genius from the 70s that combines elements of Orwell and Huxley and paints an eerily accurate picture of what the world has become (because he was prescient enough to see that the gears were in motion, even then). The world could use more writers like Brunner now, rather than the fantasists who have nothing to say.

Dave Lefevre says

I discovered John Brunner though a reference to "The Sheep Look Up" I read at some point this year. I think he is an overlooked Science Fiction master close to the level of Phillip K. Dick. The problem is that he hasn't

been rediscovered yet. He needs to be.

I posted in an update that Brunner is an uncomfortable read. You might refer back to a couple of posts that I made about Brunner. He predicts trends in society (albeit that, like Phil Dick, he predicted certain things in society to happen earlier than they have). In this book there is a right-wing Christian movement gone mad, or a hyperbolic version of some of the rhetoric we've seen this campaign season. I'm not going to go too deep into this (you can read this for yourself, and you might not draw the same conclusions I have), but some of the things in this book are very uncomfortably close to things we are seeing today. This is classic John Brunner.

Maybe the only thing I can harshly criticize here is that the "happy ending" was so complete. The world here does live "happily ever after." Probably a product of those early "book of the month" years of science fiction when that sort of ending was needed to sell the manuscript. It's part of PKD's work, too. If this was part of the 70s output of either writer I suspect that the ending would have been "we've made a big step but there's always more to do." Who today thinks the human race will perfect itself? I have to admit that I don't see that ever happening.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

REM: "The Stone That Never Came Down" by John Brunner

(Original Review, 1980-09-12)

The classic tests on this subject were done something like 25 years ago, and became sufficiently well known that by the late 60's they were turning up (in cut-down versions with animal subjects) in high school science fairs. The test was fairly simple: a sensor was rigged to detect Rapid Eye Movements (characteristic of the deepest (fourth) level of sleep and generally simultaneous with dreams) and attached to various devices to wake up the sleeper whenever REM began.

Lera says

A morality tale, but an entertaining one. On the brink of WWII, can a new virus save humanity? Rather sweet and 70s that the only thing he thought wouldn't be affected was partying and recreational drug use.

tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

review of

John Brunner's The Stone that Never Came Down

by tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE - October 28, 2018

I've been singing critical praises of John Brunner ever since I discovered him a few years back & every time I read another bk by him it's a pleasure. Here's the epigraph to "BOOK ONE Ascent":

Dissidentes Christianorum antistites cum plebe discissa in palatium intromissos, monetbat civilis, ut discordiis consopitis, quisque nullo vetante, religioni suae serviret intrepidus. Quod agebat ideo obstinate ut dissensiones augens licentia, non timeret unanimantem postea plebem, nullas infestas hominibus bestias, ut sunt sibi ferales plerique Christianorum expertus.

"—Ammianus Marcellinus: *Res Gestae*" - p 1

"**Ammianus Marcellinus** (born c.330, died c.391 – 400) was a Roman soldier and historian who wrote the penultimate major historical account surviving from antiquity (preceding Procopius). His work, known as the ***Res Gestae***, chronicled in Latin the history of Rome from the accession of the Emperor Nerva in 96 to the death of Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378, although only the sections covering the period 353–378 survive." - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ammianus_Marcellinus...

I didn't have much luck producing a coherent translation with online means so here's a bad approximation:

"The leaders of the Christians, with his people was divided up in the king's house: the dissident intromissos, as per civil law, was executed, there was no opposition, otherwise they were allowed to serve their own religious feelings in an unsurpassed way. The license of which he had allowed so tenaciously that they will increase; they are causing the divisions, there is no fear of a united Christianity later on among the people, & no sense that they trouble the men, the wild beasts, that they are in disagreement with the majority of the Christians.

"—Ammianus Marcellinus: *Achievements*"

I took so many liberties w/ that that it's probably dramatically wrong. Latin scholars, feel free to add a corrective comment! The time & place seem dystopic. What is going on?:

"It was dreadfully cold in here. Filtered by the dervishes of the snow, a street-lamp beam lanced between the curtains and showed him his breath clouding before his face. The time-switch which had brought the radio to life also controlled an electric fan-heater, but the middle-element was broken and anyhow the power was usually browned out nowadays. If only he could afford to turn on the central heating . . ." - p 4

Then again, this could be a time from my life. There're confrontations w/ Christian bullies running amok. One of the protagonists won't give the bullies any money unless they can answer a question:

""You can have this if you name a weapon of modern war that wasn't invented and first used by a Christian country!" - p 10

""Can't answer, hm? Not surprising! The whole lot is yours, from the hand-grenade to the hydrogen bomb! So stop wasting my time. I have to go to work. And it wouldn't do you any harm to work for a change, instead of sponging off the rest of us who do!"" - p 11

Needless to say, this, ahem, didn't go over too well. &, yeah, there's racism too:

"These days it was a common habit to pass over a black kid who talked back to teachers, and slap on his record a rubber stamp saying INEDUCABLE. And half of them were glad to be out of school, but furious at being out of work as well." - p 18

The action's taking place in England, where Brunner lived, but one of the characters is an American evangelist who's being recruited by an English Christian crusader who he's dubious about joining forces w/:

"["]You join her in her New Year's Crusade, and you'll be on the map for good and all. It would make you—well it would make you the Billy Graham of the nineteen-eighties!" - p 20

I don't know how many people remember Billy Graham these days. He only died on February 21, 2018, so it wasn't that long ago, but I think he was far beyond his prime by then. During the Vietnam War he was possibly the most public Christian apologist for the US invasion & continued oppression of the Vietnamese people — not that he put it that way, of course. I was raised in a conservative Christian family & when I was about 15, maybe in late 1968, my sister, later a missionary, took me to a Billy Graham Crusade at the Baltimore Civic Center — a place that held thousands of people. It was the closest thing to a nazi rally that I ever 'hope' to attend. One of the main things I remember about it was the showing of a movie about a teenager whose life becomes extremely degraded as a result of 'straying from the path.' It was very much in the spirit of the hyper-conservative TV show "Dragnet" in which doom & gloom & guilt were slathered on like leprous hog fat on a piece of nice clean white bread. I was horrified by Graham's obviously unscrupulous crowd manipulation. As such, Brunner really nails it w/ his reference here. This bk was published in 1973 when the war was still ongoing & Brunner was an anti-war activist so I'm sure he was fully aware of Graham's significance. Brunner was no fool when it came to his own country's future either as is demonstrated by shades of Brexit in the following:

"—Can it really be on the cards that we'll see a military coup in Italy, like the Greek one? And that a junta of generals would try to pull them out of the Common Market?" - p 30

"—And I said, "Do you really think there's no hope for us at all?" And he looked at me for a bit, with that odd quizzical expression, and then he produced that little phial of capsules, tiny little yellow things no bigger than rice-grains, and said, "This may be the answer. I hope it is." And I said . . . God, I must have been drunk by then! I said, "If that's the case, I'd like some." And he said, "Okay, here you are. You deserve it more than most people." And like a crazy fool I took it!" - pp 30-31

Now, I've ridiculed the 2011 SF film called "Limitless" about drugs making someone smarter. My point has been that humans seem to want everything to be as easy as popping a pill. Alas, if you want to be smart, *you might actually have to work at it* & you might not get much respect for it either. Brunner's story might seem to be a precursor to "Limitless" &, to a small extent, it is — but it's much more nuanced.

"["]Living animal tissue is ideal. Which is why we call it 'viral coefficient'."

""You mean it breeds?" Sawyer cried. "You mean it's infectious?"

""Not infectious!" Randolph snapped. "Cold air, sunlight, even dilution in plain water will inactivate it almost at once. But . . . Well, without being infectious, it may possibly be contagious.["]" - p 51

That's an interesting distinction, eh?!

"Strictly, a **contagious** disease is one transmitted by physical contact, whereas an **infectious** one is

transmitted via microorganisms in the air or water. In practice there is little or no difference in **meaning** between **contagious** and **infectious** when applied to disease or its spread." - contagious | Definition of contagious in English by Oxford Dictionaries - <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/def...>

As you may've noticed by now, in an avoidance of spoiling the plot for you I've dropped hints w/o providing full coherence. As such, my review is somewhat akin to the note left by a dead central character. "These passages, however, were islands of clarity in a muddle of jargon, parasyntaxis, and abominable straining after pointless puns." (p 47)

"Chest Cee! 'Sdense! Corpo di barragio! you spoof of visibility ina freakfog, of mixed sex xases among goats, hill cat and plain mousey, Bugamy Bob and his old Shanvocht! The Blackfriars treacle plaster outrage be liddled! Therewith was released in that kingsrick of Humidia a poisoning volume of cloud barrage indeed. Yet all they who heard or redelivered are now with that family of bards and Vergobretas himself and the crowd of Caraculacticors as much no more as be they not yet now or had they then notever been."*

"Malcolm took the sheet of paper he was offered, glanced at it, and passed it to Ruth. Having read it more slowly, she exclaimed, "Why. it's like something out of *Finnegans Wake*!"

""Right! Professor, Dr. Post *did* leave a record of his experience—at any rate, as complete a record as he thought would be necessary, knowing that with total recall he could later compile as detailed an analysis as anyone might wish for. And here it is. Not a farrago of rubbish, but the result of trying to condense scores of different levels of experience—real and vicarious—into the narrowest possible compass. Language isn't designed to carry that kind of load, Not ordinary language, anyhow."" - pp 85-86

*Finnegans Wake p 48, Viking Press, February 1975 paperback edition

"We had done some French and Latin at school but I knew virtually no German or Italian and it was clear that Joyce exploited both of these languages continually. I would take a dictionary and work through a chapter, looking up any word I thought suited the language in question. I soon learned that the most cryptic elements were often pure English. Grotesque orthography was often repeated verbatim in the Oxford English Dictionary. I suspected that Joyce was deliberately revivifying many archaic and dialectal usages. Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* and the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* provided numerous identifications of items in FW or of words very close to Joyce's." - p 29, The Finnegans Wake Experience - Roland McHugh

""Urea stimulates activity in the nervous system," Malcolm said. "Loss of power to excrete it as allantoin has been compared to adding a permanent pep-pill to our diet."" - p 142, The Stone that Never Came Down

"Muscle loss, osteoporosis, and vascular disease are common in subjects with reduced renal function. Despite intensive research of the underlying risk factors and mechanisms driving these phenotypes, we still lack effective treatment strategies for this underserved patient group. Thus, new approaches are needed to identify effective treatments. We believe that nephrologists could learn much from biomimicry; i.e., studies of nature's models to solve complicated physiological problems and then imitate these fascinating solutions to develop novel interventions. The hibernating bear (Ursidae) should be of specific interest to the nephrologist as they ingest no food or water for months, remaining anuric and immobile, only to awaken with low blood urea nitrogen levels, healthy lean body mass, strong bones, and without evidence for thrombotic complications. Identifying the mechanisms by which bears prevent the development of azotemia, sarcopenia, osteoporosis, and atherosclerosis despite being inactive and anuric could lead to novel interventions for both prevention and treatment of patients with chronic kidney disease."

[..]

"This unique ability of bears to recycle urea during hibernation is not present in other hibernating mammals, such as the Columbian ground squirrel or the hedgehog."

- "Hibernating bears (Ursidae): metabolic magicians of definite interest for the nephrologist" - PeterStenvinkel, Alkesh H.Jani, Richard J.Johnson - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science...>

""How people delude themselves," Malcolm muttered. "Sooner or later all the finest ideals of mankind have led to overreaction. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and was perverted into a justification for slavery. The proud slogan of the French Revolution was inscribed over the guillotine. The oppressed victims of the tsars proceeded to treat their former rulers with even greater brutality."

""It's a fearful pattern," Sawyer sighed."

Indeed.

Charles Harrison says

Phew, emotionally heavy going as I have come to expect from Brunner. When he says Europe is on the brink of destruction he does not mess around. The rise of right wing movements, troops on the streets and religious fanaticism is believable as it is terrifying. Thankfully the 21st century as he saw it is no way near as bad but odd echoes are here and then which just adds to my respect for this work written more than 40 years ago. The fact that (spoiler) the interesting debate around medical ethics is cut short by a massacre at a gay club is especially poignant. Perhaps not as far reaching in scope as *Stand on Zanzibar* or his other greats this is however a shorter and more accessible book which delivers on Brunner's grim view of the future. It is unusual in that it ends in a positive manner. Probably best not to read too many books like this in a row as it will leave you scared and angry!

Joe says

Clever ideas and well written. I doubted the book to start with but it picks up well and I greatly enjoyed it in the end. An introspective on war and the human condition. Also my first ever John Brunner book but will not be the last.

Kent says

A solid SF effort from Brunner. This is only my second book from him, but I shall be reading more. This story describes a near future, might as well be now, where the world is on the brink of war. There are massive labor strikes around Europe, religious violence from a group of moral protectors, and confrontations between the countries of Europe. A man receives a drug from a scientist and starts feeling very different. The scientist is then murdered. This drug has the power to give the user a clearer conscience, health, reflexes, and a near photographic memory. A group of the people who were accidentally infected by the drug, which is more like a virus, take it upon themselves to stop the world from coming to war and stopping the religious

brigade who stands to profit from these conflicts.

Ken says

This is a novel written in 1973, and has always been a favorite of mine, and this is probably the third or fourth time that I have read this fine book. Although the tale is set primarily in England, it describes a dystopia in which poverty, inflation, unemployment, and disillusionment are rampant around the world, and WW III seems just around the corner. And, to make matters worse, members of a right-wing political/religious group, The Campaign Against Moral Pollution (Godheads), are armed with crosses which they use as weapons to demand alms and obedience from anyone they can shake down. However, the entire world might change dramatically for the better if a mysterious new drug known as VC is allowed to spread throughout mankind. There don't appear to be any negative side effects, and the drug drastically increases the individual's natural empathy, and grants total and complete access to one's memory. After being infected, a person's natural filters and prejudices are dismantled, and one is truly free to experience what it means to be human for the rest of their life. The novel describes how this change effects numerous individuals, and ends at kind of a 'dawning of a new age for mankind'. The characters are not that carefully delineated, but the storyline is so compelling that this can be overlooked. And, I think the book authentically demonstrates that the political and social status quo would be violently opposed to anything of this nature since their power lies in fear and divisiveness. I would recommend this book to anyone who understands that some of the best science fiction is more about adventurous storytelling than excellent writing
