

# science fiction news

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*Selectors: Kingsley Amis, John Carnell, Dr J. G. Porter*

## NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE NO FUTURE IN IT

By JOHN BRUNNER

JOHN BRUNNER is one of the leading British sf authors and one of the youngest. He is only twenty-nine years old now, and yet a leading American sf magazine began publishing his stories ten years ago. Since then he has proved beyond doubt that his achievement and his talent are not merely ephemeral; his early promise has been more than fulfilled. This present collection of short stories, the first of his to appear in Britain, represents the best of ten years' work.

The range of Brunner's imagination and thought is extremely wide; this book is the clearest possible evidence of his versatility in the diversity of its themes—a murder mystery in space, the plight of a man endowed with a telepathic talent he cannot control, robots and computers, human social problems—but the impulse behind all the stories is the result of looking at the world of today or tomorrow and saying, 'Now, suppose . . .'

In this way Brunner has treated some of the most traditional notions with a great deal of humour: medieval wizards claimed the power to conjure devils, and that is obvious nonsense—but suppose . . . Every child knows what the moon is made of; scientists are less sure, but suppose . . . A computer is in fact a perfectly literal moron, obeying its instructions to the letter, but suppose that it takes logic too logically . . .

Some of the stories have a more serious view than this. 'Fair' (described by one critic as 'worthy of inclusion in an anthology of the best of anything') is a bitter and yet hopeful commentary on a world under the threat of destruction. 'Elected Silence' is the tragic story of a man who returns to the company of his own kind after years in solitary confinement on an alien world. 'Badman', dealing on the surface with idealistic youth, reflects Brunner's constant concern to discover through his writing clues to the solution of human social and ethical problems.

As a whole, this is a book which has wit, intelligence and the creative vitality of an original imagination: it is in the tradition of the best English sf.

'I find [John Brunner's] first volume of stories impressive. He can be whimsical, as in the story of a medieval wizard who conjures a time traveller; macabre, as in "Elected Silence"; horrifying, as in "Stimulus", a Wellsian fable about interfering with the balance of nature.' *Daily Telegraph*.

'He is very effective with straight science fiction, and "Puzzle for Spacemen", "Windows of Heaven", "Elected Silence" and "Stimulus" are as good as, and similar to, Clarke's work, which is high praise indeed . . . a good modern contemporary.'

*New Worlds Science Fiction.*  
Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s

## Another story from a member . . .

### The Immortal

By G. S. COLE

AH, HERE, the bridge at last. And quiet too. Just right; no one near, not even police. And this time it's going to work—it's got to!

The parapet . . . oops, there goes my hat . . . is . . . higher . . . than . . . I . . . thought. Ah, good, good. One last look round. Big Ben striking—exactly midnight. What better time? One leg up. . . . Goodbye world! (How hackneyed can you get?)

And over! Down, down, somersaulting, falling, falling, falling . . .

'It's going to work. Oh, God, it has to work!

Going to fall, going to fall until I reach the bottom. Going . . . Touched, crashed, smashed—BOUNCE! Oh, God, I bounced!

Blackness.

This one's name was Forster. I mean that he was the psychiatrist. I hadn't seen him before, which was unusual, because I must have seen every other head-shrinker in the country. Not that a new one made any difference—they all said the same things.

We sat in his office and he squinted at me through massive, black-rimmed glasses: 'You're really a very lucky man, Mr Renell; not many people survive after as many hours as you spent in the river.'

He smiled a smile as massive as his spectacles. Ear to ear, like a slice of melon!

'No I'm not,' I said, and the smile vanished, surprisingly fast.

'What do you mean?'

Now it was my turn to smile. 'I mean that I'm not lucky. I'm immortal.'

He took that quite well—used to hearing it, I suppose; in fact, his expression seemed all the more confident for it.

Then I began to explain: 'There's a theory—I don't know if it's an accepted medical one, but it's about the dreams in which you feel that you're falling from a terrific height. Normally you always wake up, just before you hit the ground, but according to this theory, if you ever do land, you die.'

Forster pursed his lips and nodded; he looked ridiculous. After a pause I said: 'Well, I keep having that dream; first when I had pneumonia and everyone thought I would die; it puzzled me a bit even then. Later I was in a car smash and I dreamed the same dream, and then again, when I jumped off Beachy Head. That was after my wife left me—she thought I was crazy.'

I could almost see him ticking off the symptoms in his head. He watched me for a moment, and then he said, quite casually: 'Beachy Head?' What a fool!

I nodded. 'Multiple head wounds, six broken ribs, a smashed pelvic girdle and abrasions; you wouldn't have believed that I could survive. Anyway, then I got wise to it—you know: that I was immortal. You see, every time I was in any danger I'd dream this dream. I'd fall and fall and hit the bottom and then——' I paused.

'And then?' Forster was all ears.

'Then I'd bounce. I'd hit the bottom and bounce. I reckon I've kicked the bucket two hundred and seventy-four—no, sorry, five—times, and every time something, God knows what, steps in and drags me back up to life. I always bounce. I tell you, doctor, it's disheartening. If a man can't commit suicide in peace, it's just not good enough!'