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Michael Crichton and the End of Radical Environmentalism

By Joseph Bast

Michael Crichton, the author of *The Andromeda Strain*, *Jurassic Park*, and other block-buster thrillers, has penned a novel that could profoundly change the national and even international debate over global warming. It's long overdue.

Crichton's *State of Fear*, with a reported first print run of 1.7 million copies, is an action thriller that doubles as a scientific primer on global warming and other environmental topics. Crichton's protagonists – a scientist, a lawyer, a philanthropist, and two remarkably athletic women – race around the world foiling the plots of environmental extremists seeking to frighten the world into embracing their radical agenda. Along the way, they take time to explain to their adversaries, often in surprising detail, the flawed science behind the global warming and other imagined environmental crises.

Books that combine social commentary and science with fiction are not new or even rare. A socialist classic in this genre is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and two libertarian classics are Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. In each case, characters who grapple with shadowy foes suddenly launch into speeches about economics, political science, and history.

One of Crichton's characters whips out a laptop computer and portable printer to produce lists of scientific journal articles saying global climate models are fatally flawed, while another holds up a series of foam-core posters showing graphs of falling temperatures around the world. Readers are told temperatures in the Antarctic are falling and the ice cap is growing thicker, extreme weather events are becoming less frequent, and changes in land use (e.g., more roads and concrete buildings) cause more surface warming than man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases. To persuade readers to take him seriously, Crichton offers footnotes, an appendix with sources for the data appearing in the graphs, and an annotated bibliography.

In an "Author's Message" at the end the book, Crichton summarizes his own views on the science of global warming and other environmental subjects such as resource depletion, the precautionary principle, and wildlife preservation. His stated beliefs include:

* "Nobody knows how much of the present warming trend might be man-made"

* "Nobody knows how much warming will occur in the next century."

* "The current near-hysterical preoccupation with safety is at best a waste of resources and a crimp on the human spirit, and at worst an invitation to totalitarianism."

* “[T]he thinking of environmental activists ... seems oddly fixed in the concepts and rhetoric of the 1970s.”

* “We need a new environmental movement, with new goals and new organizations.”

No doubt, leaders of the nation’s big environmental advocacy organizations will attempt to discredit Crichton, just as they have S. Fred Singer, Richard Lindzen, Sallie Balliunas, Patrick Michaels, Robert Balling, and the late Dixy Lee Ray. The difference this time, however, is that all those dissenters are or were prominent scientists respected by their peers but relatively unknown to the general public. Crichton is not a scientist, but he has accurately summarized their findings in a book that will reach millions of readers in the coming months, and tens of millions in the coming years.

Crichton anticipates the coming assault and puts his finger on the motivation of his critics: Environmentalism today is a multi-billion dollar industry funded by government research grants and leftist philanthropists and dependent on fear-mongering to keep the money coming in. By exposing this scam, *State of Fear* could cost environmental groups millions, even billions, of dollars in the coming years.

State of Fear does not mark the beginning of the end of radical environmentalism. Public support for the movement was already shrinking as its Chicken Little predictions failed to come true and its obsolete big-government ideology put it far outside the political mainstream. But Crichton’s remarkable book may mark the end of the beginning, and the start of a “new environmental movement” that puts science ahead of ideology and the legitimate interests of the everyone ahead of the careers of a few.

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Joseph L. Bast is coauthor of *Eco-Sanity: A Common-sense Guide to Environmentalism* and publisher of *Environment & Climate News*. He can be reached at jbast@heartland.org.