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### Author pours cold water on global warming

United States

11 December 2004 08:07

He is most famous for his far-fetched tale of how dinosaurs could be brought to life with DNA from mosquitoes trapped in amber. Now the bestselling author Michael Crichton has written a thriller about ecoterrorism that the critics say is equally fantastic in its refusal to accept that global warming is a clear and present danger.

With two million copies of *State of Fear* hitting bookshops across the world, Crichton's thesis that the "interminable yammering of fearmongers" about climate change is being used to keep ordinary people perpetually anxious will reach a huge audience.

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As diplomats and scientists gathered at the 10th international convention on climate change in Buenos Aires on Friday to discuss where to go from Kyoto, the 62-year-old author of *Jurassic Park* and *Rising Sun* arrived in Britain to promote his 600-page "techno thriller".

The story of a South Pacific island that launches a multimillion-pound lawsuit against the United States, and green terrorists who plot to manufacture a series of earthquakes, underwater landslides and tsunamis to prove that global warming is happening, has an unusual denouement: a 14-page bibliography and a five-page authorial note explaining his extreme scepticism about global warming.

Crichton fills his latest with graphs and "facts" against global warming. Rather than warning readers about the dangers of dinosaurs, nanotechnology or rising Japanese power, he bolsters his argument by citing the work of prominent climate-change sceptics, including the political scientist Bjorn Lomborg.

"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," he concludes.

Highlighting a "natural warming trend" currently afflicting the globe, he estimates that in the next century temperatures will rise by just "0,812436 degrees Celsius", well below the 1,5 to six degrees Celsius estimated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Calling the scientific consensus on climate change "creepy", he told the BBC on Friday: "Science has nothing to do with consensus. Politics is about consensus."

Scientists and environmentalists greeted his arguments with derision on Friday. Even his hero, Lomborg, disputed his calculations.

Tony Jupiter, director of Friends of the Earth, said: "It's interesting to see how climate change sceptics have truly entered the world of fiction.

"They've been in that world for some time, but they've been positioned as factually based. The fact that these arguments are presented as a novel puts them in their correct place in society.

"Go to the basic model prepared by the Hadley Centre. [It shows] a very clear relation between rising concentrations of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere and rising temperatures. These temperature increases could be very considerable in a very short period of time.

"That's not scaremongering. It is based on the scientific consensus."

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The global temperature has risen by between 0,6 and 0,7 degrees Celsius in the past century. Globally, the 1990s were the hottest decade, and the seven hottest years since 1861 all fell in that decade.

Vicky Pope, head of the climate-predictions programme at the Hadley Centre, the globally renowned climatic-research institute, said "very few" scientists dispute the latest IPCC report.

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"The consensus on warming since the 1850s is that a large part is due to man's activities," she said. "That's the line of the IPCC report and that position is strengthening. It is a very widespread consensus.

"There are a few very vocal people who are sceptics, only some of whom are actually scientists. Sceptics obviously have a place in the community.

"It is an important part of the scientific process to question peoples' results scientifically. If it is good science, it needs to be aired. It is frustrating if it is not good science."

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In Buenos Aires, Lomborg -- author of *The Sceptical Environmentalist* -- said: "We have to be careful about getting our scientific knowledge from fictional material.

"I argued strongly against the movie *The Day after Tomorrow* -- it's a great movie but it's got very, very little to do with reality. I wouldn't want to take our understanding from that movie and a Michael Crichton novel."

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While Lomborg dismissed Crichton's calculations, suggesting that a rise of two to three degrees Celsius is most likely, he welcomed his critique of the "precautionary principle" in environmental science.

"The 'better safe than sorry' approach seems like such a good idea but there's always 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'.

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"If you're always better safe than sorry, you don't actually move forward, you don't invent new things, you don't achieve greatness.

"Worrying has its costs. If we over-worry about some things, we under-worry about others. If the Crichton story can help us to say we do over-worry about global warming, then maybe it does serve some good purpose."

### Writer's message on 'climate of fear'

Crichton on climate change. Extracts from "author's message" in *State of Fear*.

- In every debate, all sides overstate the extent of existing knowledge and its degree of certainty.
- Nobody knows how much of the present warming trend might be a natural

phenomenon.

- Nobody knows how much warming will occur in the next century. The computer models vary by 400%, de facto proof that nobody knows. But if I had to guess -- the only thing anyone is doing, really -- ... the increase will be 0,812436 degrees Celsius.
- For anyone to believe in impending resource scarcity, after 200 years of such false alarms, is kind of weird. I don't know whether such a belief today is best ascribed to ignorance of history, sclerotic dogmatism, unhealthy love of Malthus, or simple pigheadedness.
- Most environmental "principles" (such as sustainable development or the precautionary principle) have the effect of preserving the economic advantages of the West and thus constitute modern imperialism toward the developing world. It is a nice way of saying: "We got ours and we don't want you to get yours, because you'll cause too much pollution".
- We desperately need a nonpartisan, blinded funding mechanism to conduct research ... Scientists are only too aware of whom they are working for.
- Everybody has an agenda. Except me.

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