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Environmental lawyer turned novelist Sam Bleicher spins a climate change thriller in “The Plot to Cool the Planet”



Released on Earth Day 2019, this new novel, a *National Indie Excellence Awards* Finalist, puts global warming and geoengineering at the center of a gripping speculative fiction involving a murder mystery, a daring secret plot, and intense international conflict.

In “**The Plot to Cool the Planet**,” (Newman Springs Publishing, April 22, 2019), author Sam Bleicher draws on his broad knowledge as an environmental lawyer, academic, and government official to craft a narrative around real-world threats to the human species.

The story isn’t just about an abstract future danger. When outspoken climate scientist Dr. Ilsa Hartquist is murdered in 2020, the Canadian investigators assigned to the case are convinced the motive was to stop her push for controversial solar geo-engineering methods to slow global warming. They are determined to find the assassins and those who paid for it.

With each passing year, the future Dr. Hartquist predicted brings more extreme storms, shrinking polar icecaps, recurring floods, forest fires, and falling agricultural and fishery yields. These changes disrupt coastal cities and undermine national economies. But the world’s leaders are paralyzed, as desires for short-term economic gain eclipse the long-term well-being of humanity.

Stunned by Hartquist’s murder and frustrated by global inaction, diplomats from four small-island states - Maldives, Trinidad & Tobago, Mauritius, and Singapore - launch a clandestine solar geoengineering project to cool the planet, ignoring international procedures and institutions in an attempt to save their people and humanity. Their scheme exposes another secret project with opposing aims, causing military confrontations and forcing hard decisions by world leaders as UN Ambassadors seek to turn the political crisis to constructive ends..

While the book’s storyline is fiction, Bleicher marshals scientific fact to convey the urgent need to avoid the irreversible impacts of global warming. He hopes his novel will bring these abstract dangers to life and make them more accessible to a wider audience.

“Despite the growing evidence of disaster ahead, the world’s leaders continue to promote new fossil fuel energy extraction and transportation facilities,” Bleicher says. “We must abandon this ‘business as usual’ path before we cross the line to uncontrollable, irreversible destruction of civilization.”

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About the Author



SAM BLEICHER is an adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. From 2014 to 2018, he was a member and vice chair of the Virginia Air Pollution Control Board. He is an active Member of the League of Conservation Voters and its Climate Victory Council.

He holds a J.D. degree from Harvard Law School and B.A. degree from Northwestern University, Phi Beta Kappa with honors in economics. His new novel, “**The Plot to Cool the Planet**” draws on his experience as a senior official in the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Department of State; a law firm partner and lobbyist; and a law professor in the United States, China, and Russia. In 2013 he published “Appointments, A Novel of Politics in Our Nation’s Capital,” under the pen name David Carmell, available on Amazon.

For more information about the author, visit <https://www.strategicpathllc.com/novelist>

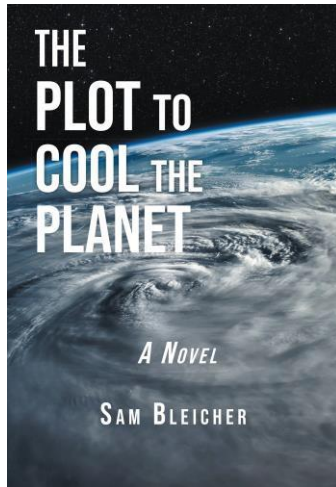
In an interview, SAM BLEICHER can discuss:

- Why climate disruption is an urgent global issue that governments and society must address immediately
- Social and political obstacles to avoiding the irreversible dangers posed by global warming
- The real-world science of solar geoengineering and its role in his novel
- What individuals can do about climate disruption

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About the Book



“The Plot to Cool the Planet”
Sam Bleicher | April 22, 2019
Newman Springs Publishing
Paperback ISBN: 978-1-64096-289-7 | \$24.95
Digital ISBN: 978-1-64096-290-3 | \$9.99
Speculative Fiction | Mystery

Grounded in real science and plausible human characters, **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** traces a chain of events involving unauthorized uses of solar engineering and their consequences. It was recently named a Finalist in the *National Indie Excellence Awards* competition.

By 2020, increasingly frequent extreme storms and rising sea levels are undermining the viability of coastal cities. Millions of subsistence farmers and fishermen are facing starvation and ruin as crop yields fall, forests are destroyed by fire, and fisheries disappear. No nation is volunteering to take in climate refugees.

In June, Dr. Ilsa Hartquist, an outspoken climate scientist, is murdered. Investigators believe she was assassinated to end her forceful, unorthodox advocacy for untested solar geo-engineering techniques that might slow global warming.

Stunned by her murder and frustrated by the global paralysis on climate disruption, four small-island diplomats secretly launch a rogue project to cool the planet using solar geoengineering. The odds of success are low, and the threat to their careers and lives is tangible. Their efforts uncover another surreptitious climate intervention.

The book addresses the technical challenges, political controversy, and resulting military and diplomatic confrontations over governance of solar geoengineering. These consequences force fundamental new national and international policies on global governance of solar geoengineering.



What Readers Are Saying

FINALIST, 13th Annual National Indie Excellence Awards

(excerpts of reviews from reader emails, Amazon and NetGalley)

Excellent! Simply a great “read” – the characters are interesting and believable; the plots ... are real page-turners; the science is thought-provoking and informative.

Tops in the new Cli-Fi genre ... a *tour de force*. It combines a murder mystery with riveting concerns about the mounting climate crisis. The details of international organizations and international diplomacy ... are highly plausible. The most impressive accomplishment is that it left me feeling hopeful.

If you have any interest in climate politics, *The Plot To Cool The Planet* is the book for you. It has EVERYTHING. ... a murder mystery thriller replete with a quirky pair of detectives ... a glamorous climate-Cassandra, a steamy romance ... even a diabolical Putin ... all the while slyly slipping in a wealth of authoritative information.

This novel calls out to be made into a movie or TV miniseries. It is set in the present and near future in a wide variety of exotic locations. ... Once I started reading, it was hard to put down ... the story is compelling. The book reflects present political realities, including references to Trump and Putin ...

I especially enjoy fiction that approaches scientific topics and makes them more accessible. ... thorough and enlightening.

Engrossing Thriller With Powerful “Today's Headlines” Impact. A quite fascinating thriller about ... climate change and the drastic lengths to which some ... will go to either conceal and deny it, or to alter it ... will keep readers glued to the pages.

Fans of political thrillers, military stories, and science fiction adventures are all sure to find something to satisfy them in this genre-spanning work ... a highly engaging and well-written work of climate fiction with an important moral hangover at its end.

An Interview with SAM BLEICHER



1. You have a solid, shall we say “non-fiction” foundation in academia – why did you decide to write “The Plot to Cool the Planet” as a novel rather than addressing issues related to climate disruption in a non-fiction book?

I wrote “**The Plot to Cool the Planet**” for several reasons. First, I wanted to provide a more hopeful vision of the future than many advocates and opponents of immediate action offer. Advocates of action on climate disruption often emphasize the necessity for radical transformation of our entire economic and social structure to mitigate climate disruption. That seems unacceptable, if not impossible, to current leaders. Opponents of action sometimes argue that immediate action is unnecessary, other times that the situation is already hopeless.

Right now the world seems to be incapable of taking rational action; the task seems too big, too demanding, too impossible. My goal is to suggest that bold, unconventional steps forward are possible if we try, and the immediate risks of inaction are too great to “wait and see what happens.”

Second, I have seen the weak impact of non-fiction reports on the challenges of climate change. Intergovernmental Committee reports on scientific research are typically too carefully balanced, narrowed, and qualified. They don't arouse an emotional response or provide clear policy guidance. As a result, various policymakers focus on those findings that reinforce their own priorities. Media coverage of scientific reports is often slanted to fit into a larger, more immediate political story. The general public rarely reads or acts on the implicit policy messages in non-fiction reports.

Third, I have observed that most people instinctively become far more engrossed in the fate of a handful of human beings, even fictional ones, than in statistical studies of the thousands, millions, or billions of anonymous human beings who will suffer. I want readers of **"The Plot to Cool the Planet"** to empathize with my characters and come to care about what they are attempting to accomplish. I hope they will absorb some of their urgent desire to slow the global warming threat.

Fourth, I enjoyed the challenge of taking this complex scientific and political reality and creating a human story that would engage readers' attention and sympathy. Even so, **"The Plot to Cool the Planet"** still simplifies the scientific and political complexities obstructing efforts to change the future of our planet.

2. Is the science and engineering in your novel real, or science fiction?

I have made a serious effort to present the current scientific, social, and political realities as clearly and accurately as my knowledge and understanding allow. Of course the specific events in **"The Plot to Cool the Planet"** are set in the future, and I have no reason to believe they will actually occur. But I think they qualify as plausible realities, not simply fantasies.

3. Are the government decision-making processes in your novel realistic?

I worked for more than a decade inside government agencies at a fairly senior level, and many more decades trying to understand and interpret government processes to clients and colleagues as a lawyer in private practice. I also spent many years as a professor teaching environmental law and international law, mulling over my experience.

Any single description of governmental decision-making at any level is inevitably a shorthand description of the total constellation of inputs and outputs that culminate in a government policy. That reality is demonstrated in books by high-level participants in government decisions, whether World War II Allied military decisions or the operation of the Trump White House. I believe **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** realistically captures the essence and flavor of government decision-making.

4. It’s clear from reading your book that you feel climate disruption is an issue that needs to be dealt with now. Is “The Plot to Cool the Planet” a battle cry?

In some ways, yes. But the battle is primarily political and diplomatic, not a great military battle or a heroic crusade. The characters in **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** are real human beings with strengths and weaknesses, personal anxieties and ambitions. They learn and grow and seize opportunities, make hard choices that affect themselves and others, and sometimes suffer serious consequences, fairly or unfairly. The global policy system in which they operate produces unforeseeable outcomes, for better and worse, in what I believe is a plausible way.

One of the major obstacles to action on climate change is the current governance structure of the United Nations, which is deeply tilted toward inaction. The Security Council veto power and the lack of any reliable funding mechanism make it impossible for the UN to lead implementation of the economic and social changes that must take place quickly if our species is to avoid extinction.

5. What are the most dire consequences of climate disruption?

The range of consequences of climate change will vary significantly from place to place, from decade to decade, and from one social class and economic livelihood to another. But it will have an ever-intensifying, cumulative adverse impact on everyone. **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** lays out the effects in some detail in chapters 2 and 4, and scattered discussion elsewhere. It’s a snapshot of a near-future effort to postpone these disasters, not the end of the story.

Without prompt action, the long-term result will be the same for everyone – much of the planet will be uninhabitable because of drought and desert, and most of the world’s urban coastal cities will be inundated. Without beginning now to mitigate these conditions, the planet’s ability to support earth’s current human population will shrink, resulting in social, economic, and political upheavals, and ultimately civilization as we know it will collapse.

6. What can the average person do about climate change?

Not all decision-making about climate disruption will happen in national and international governmental institutions. Every family must recognize that changes in their behavior right now are vital and will make a difference. While the government struggles to reduce the carbon emissions of utilities and other carbon-intensive industries, America's major sources of carbon emissions are now from transportation, housing, commercial buildings, and agriculture.

Buying an emission-free electric car instead of a gas-guzzling SUV or truck is one of the most important steps people can take. The auto industry has a strong financial interest in slowing the conversion to electric vehicles so it can continue to profit from its investment in factories that produce gasoline and diesel vehicles. These corporations justify their go-slow policy with the assertions that most of the public doesn't want electric vehicles and the infrastructure is not yet in place. But the industry has done little to change public attitudes or install necessary charging stations. Every purchase of an electric vehicle demonstrates to the fossil fuel industry and manufacturers who drag their feet that they will be left behind in the inevitable transition.

Other individual decisions also matter right now: Reducing energy consumption by insulating homes; moving to an urban center near public transportation rather than a suburban single-family house; installing rooftop solar electricity in apartments, homes, and office buildings; and reforming local zoning to stop urban sprawl. Taken together, these actions will make a significant difference.

Most important, individuals and public interest groups must press our political leaders to make global warming a top priority concern. The public everywhere must push them by words and actions to face up to politically unpopular decisions that many powerful interests oppose.

We must make our public and private sector leaders recognize the importance of saving ourselves and our children (not just abstract "future generations") from lives of economic misery, social disruption, anxiety, hopelessness, and anger at our generation's short-sightedness. We have only one chance to get it right.

7. You've lived and lectured in Russia and China – is climate change a major concern in those two countries?

What I've discovered from teaching and lecturing abroad is that I'm pushing on an open door. Once people, especially younger people, learn the physical realities and the economic, social, and political consequences of climate disruption, they understand that

action is essential. Unfortunately, people in China and Russia have less opportunity than Americans and Europeans to demand action by their leaders.

The Chinese tend to view society as a long-term enterprise. Concern for their descendants is the mirror of concern for their ancestors. In Russia, by contrast, the ethos tends to be less communal, more self-interested, and less self-sacrificing. The Russian economy and society are built around exploitation of minerals, and oil and natural gas. Ironically, Russia may be in a more precarious position than China or the US as the Arctic permafrost melts and climate disruption takes its toll.

I hope that **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** attracts foreign as well as domestic readers and expands global awareness of the need for action to address this problem.

8. Why did you include a murder mystery subplot in your novel? What do you think that adds to the story?

I hope the suspense and personal drama at the outset of **“The Plot to Cool the Planet”** keeps the book from feeling like a poorly disguised lecture on global warming. That Dr. Hartquist is an activist climate scientist is not incidental. Mitigating climate change is the core of her life and career, the cause of her death, and the inspiration for the unorthodox actions of the diplomats and government leaders that follow.

9. What books are currently on your nightstand?

I have just read *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks Against the United States: A Speculative Novel*. It is stimulating reading, constrained by the concept that it is a government report, but the author does manage to inject some humor into this grim subject. I also have read *The Uninhabitable Planet* by David Wallace-Wells, which vividly catalogues the grimly destructive effects we can foresee if society doesn’t abandon our “business in liquidation” economic model.

I’m in a book club that tends to focus on American history, so in the last few years I have read, among others, *The Bully Pulpit*, *The Quartet*, *The Passage of Power*, *Scorpions*, *Heirs of the Founders*, and *The Soul of America*. We are currently working our way through Ellis, *American Dialogue*.

Loving and Leaving Washington by John Yochelson is a memoir and summary of his government service that I find comparable to my own in some ways. I have also just



finished a quick read entitled *Eternal Life*, a fantasy with an intriguing premise, which I stumbled across in my synagogue library.

Finally, my nightstand is littered with copies of the New Yorker, each open to a particular article I want to read but didn't have time for (and still don't).

10. What's next for you?

As a retiree, I've learned that long-term planning is somewhat presumptuous. I've always been intrigued by the Tom Stoppard play, *Rosencranz and Guildenstern Are Dead* – a story about minor figures unwittingly participating in great events, to their detriment. If “**The Plot to Cool the Planet**” is successful, I will probably try writing another book, if I can find a worthwhile story to tell.

Another possibility is to revise and update *Appointments: A Novel of Politics in Our Nation's Capital*, which I published in 2013 under the pseudonym David Carmell. It was inspired by Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*. It takes place in Washington, DC, and revolves around the ambition of a Senator to be appointed to the Supreme Court. It's available on Amazon. That process is a recurrent drama in American public life, so it remains timely. *Appointments* was favorably reviewed by friends with long years of Federal government and private sector government affairs experience but never gained serious recognition. I know a lot more now about the craft of writing fiction, and this time I would publish it under my own name.