CLIMATE CHANGED: A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE SCIENCE

Climate Changed is the story of a journey. The journey is that of the author, Philippe Squarzoni, through the subject of human-caused climate change. Aside from the personal perspective, what really makes this volume stand out is the fact it is a graphic novel. This is the first graphic novel I have ever encountered concerned with this crucial topic.

The book’s drawings possess a beautiful simplicity that well suit its unflinching narrative. However, I would have appreciated a bit more visual action: the overwhelming majority of the illustrations consist solely of people talking or thinking. While textual conveyance of a significant amount of information is appropriate, with graphic novels visual storytelling is equally necessary. Inclusion of additional dynamic images would have enhanced interest in and understanding of the story. Still, I can’t help but welcome the originality of the genre choice.

In regard to the written content, a comprehensive overview of the global warming issue is provided. An intriguing twist is further built in with the integration of real people as characters—mostly a number of international experts in the climate field. The sheer amount of information presented is impressive, ranging from the science behind Earth’s climate to the mechanisms of human-caused climate change. Most strikingly, possible repercussions and solutions are intricately described. The contents are also enhanced by extensive use of statistics, graphs, and professional interviews. To me, the greatest narrative strength of Climate Changed, however, is its focus on society’s values as the ultimate factor behind the climate emergency. This thought-provoking premise seems to offer the most effective route to abatement of and recovery from global warming.

I didn’t care for the novel’s tendency to occasionally veer into somewhat obscure cinematic references. Although adding a certain philosophical depth to the work, they also distract from the overarching narrative. I wasn’t familiar with all the referenced movies and, as a consequence, felt lost at points. Other readers may experience the same issue.

As a whole, though, I do recommend Climate Changed. It will be of particular interest to anyone unfamiliar with the subject who wishes to obtain an across-the-board picture of what global warming is about. I also recommend it to everyone who remains skeptical about whether human-caused climate change is occurring. This book will especially appeal to those who don’t care for traditional written works.

Climate Changed provides an informative, serious, and sometimes frightening overview of climate change. However, the very starkness of the novel is another point in its favor. There is far too much “literature” out there implying a debate still exists about whether human-caused climate change is even happening. It is encouraging to encounter a book that dispenses with such nonsense and imparts this global catastrophe with the urgency it demands. By focusing upon what the problem is and what can be done about it, Climate Changed becomes more than just a good read. It is a worthy contributor to the ongoing struggle to acknowledge and save ourselves from our own mistakes.

—Jennifer Yoshioka

Jennifer Yoshioka is an undergraduate meteorology major at SUNY Oswego in upstate New York.
Climate Shock provides a unique perspective on climate change. In many other books on the subject, the focus has been on one of two sides: that climate change is a hoax, or that climate change is the absolute worst phenomenon that Earth has ever experienced and there is no way we will win the battle. This book, on the other hand, fully acknowledges the impacts of climate change but also explains the solutions with optimism. While they may go overboard on times with their optimistic views, the authors do a great job in engaging the reader into recognizing that we can still make a difference—a take on climate change that is lacking in some other climate change books.

Audience. This book appeals to a very wide audience. With its readable prose and at times witty comments, it keeps the attention of its reader, regardless if the reader is your average Joe or a Ph.D. student. Additionally, I believe this book should be read by politicians, businessmen, and others in leadership roles as a wake-up call and tool for enhancing climate policy.

This book is suitable for use in teaching. In fact, I would highly recommend it. I believe students would respond very positively to the writing style of Wagner and Weitzman, which is completely different from that of most textbook authors. This book provides a great overview of the economic perspective of climate change, focusing on the big picture while providing sufficient evidence to back up the authors’ claims. I do believe this book would be best suited for a more economics-oriented class, however, as there are some sections that in my opinion would require a basic understanding of economic concepts to fully understand and appreciate.

Strengths. I found the authors’ introduction to the greenhouse gas problem, using the bathtub metaphor of rate of carbon emissions versus level of carbon in the atmosphere, to be very effective. This seemingly simple concept is misunderstood by many politicians, which the authors bluntly source as the cause of climate policy failures. This concept is carried throughout the book. The authors provide several other metaphors, such as how people buy insurance for a risk that is less than 10% (like a car accident), but don’t share the same concern for climate change despite its equal risks. The authors find effective ways like this example to describe difficult concepts, and are successful in connecting with the reader.
There is also valuable discussion on blame and the free rider effect, geoengineering as a cop-out to not doing anything to reduce carbon emissions, and basic climate terms and milestones, including the Montreal and Kyoto protocols and climate sensitivities. The authors always remind the reader of the main take-home message within each chapter, which is helpful, especially for students.

Unlike other climate change books, Climate Shock provides a clear and optimistic solution to the greenhouse gas problem: price carbon emissions as a way to make up for generations of subsidizing it. Another strength is its take on the uncertainties in climate change projections. Unlike some other authors, Wagner and Weitzman stress that the large uncertainties in temperature and other projections are not excuses for inaction. Rather, it’s these uncertainties that should be the driver for action—action that should have been taken yesterday as opposed to next year. The authors discuss the problem using a risk-assessment framework and point out the frequently overlooked fact that simply reducing carbon emissions will not solve the problem; reducing emissions to zero is the only way that the atmosphere can naturally rid itself of carbon to pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

On another note, the writing is humorous while maintaining integrity.

Weaknesses. I found Climate Shock to be very repetitive. I believe the book could have been 30 pages shorter had the authors not repeated certain facts and concepts. I also found the writing style to be difficult to understand in some sections. It took rereading those sections a few times to fully understand the authors’ point. Lastly, it seemed a bit narrow in perspective. There was no discussion on the larger picture of climate change in it being cyclical and not entirely caused by humans. I understand the economic take on the book, but a brief discussion on anthropogenic climate change in relation to other more natural drivers could have been useful.

Illustrations. The book includes several graphs depicting varying carbon emissions and climate sensitivity topics. These graphs helped illustrate the authors’ point that there indeed are great uncertainties in projected climate temperatures.

Bottom Line. I recommend this book wholeheartedly. It provides a unique perspective on the climate change issue while remaining optimistic and engaging.

—Stephanie Hoekstra

Stephanie Hoekstra is a Ph.D. candidate at East Carolina University in the Coastal Resources Management Department.
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