

Books in Review

Craig Russell

Fragment

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Reviewed by Elizabeth Diago-Navarro

Almost premonitory, Craig Russell's cli-fi novel *Fragment* approaches hot topics that populate the newspaper covers today. Climate change, political interference, and distrust in science are echoed in the fiction of *Fragment*, moving the conscience of the reader as they move public opinion in real life.

The plot begins with polar climatologist Kate Sexsmith explaining her research during a TV interview and pointing out that major glaciers in Antarctica are expected to make a major advance, which bears the risk of triggering an avalanche falling into the Ross Ice Shelf. The interview is abruptly interrupted and the researcher and two other scientists from the Kiwi's Scott Base manage to escape certain death when the Ross Ice Shelf breaks off, sending a massive fragment of ice the size of France into the ocean. Although ice shelf melting in Antarctica is not usually perceived as a consequence of climate change by the general public, in recent years, scientists have been observing and documenting such events. In the novel, the ice fragment threatens everything it encounters on its path, killing over 2,000 people in the U.S., McMurdo Station, and pretty much all of the marine life that crosses its trajectory. The fragment is picked up by the Eastern Current of the South Atlantic and navigates around the world.

Several plot lines emerge in the book thereafter. On one side, scientists are able—for the first time—to decipher the language of blue whales and start communicating with a certain individual named Ring. The author assigns whales a human-like character, with anecdotes and stories that shape their personalities. Ring is the main whale character who has been sending calls, songs, to his blue pals ahead of the fragment, to warn them about

its perils. Ring's main concern here is letting other blues know that the fragment cannot be confused with a simple iceberg, so whales should avoid diving under it or else they will drown. Both Ring and the novel's scientists will collaborate, trying to stop the potentially devastating effects of the fragment's drift, not without encountering opposition from high political spheres.

Although global warming and climate change have been well-evidenced by science on the basis of fact, it goes without saying that there are some sectors in American society that are in the practice of constantly denying scientific facts. In *Fragment*, the characters that embody science, and specifically climate denial are none other than the president of the United States and his cabinet. The U.S. president depicted in the novel was partially based on the former Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, a conservative known to be a climate change skeptic (Cameron, 2019). *Fragment* was published in 2016, right before the election of the current U.S. administration, and anticipated years of climate change denial policy to come, from the administration's doubt about the National Climate Assessment in 2018 to withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

All in all, *Fragment's* premise and execution are populated with scientific information that drives the reader to jump from the pages to the web, feeding a growing appetite for wonder that helps in sustaining the suspension of disbelief. Russell's eco-thriller succeeds in engaging the reader with its fast-pace at the same time that it explores current topics such as post-truth politics, and more unconventional areas such as interspecies communication.