

In his new novel *The Heatstroke Line*, noted legal scholar Ed Rubin tackles the issue of climate change in the unlikely genre of cli-fi—or climate change fiction. Why fiction? Presumably, because logic and reason have not been successful at stimulating action. Since Professor Rubin has a clear policy goal in addition to a literary one, his dystopic vision of the future is not the kind of wholly foreign world in which science fiction is often set. Instead, the power of Professor Rubin's book comes from the relatively familiarity and banality of the characters' world, even as the horrors mount.

The protagonist, Daniel Danton, is an entomologist in Denver, being recruited by the most prestigious university in North America—the University of South Baffin Island. Like *White Noise* by Don DeLillo, the relatively staid and prosaic world of academic politics occupies the foreground of the novel but principally to illuminate the background. What happened that the world is at once familiar but also jarringly different? The answers emerge in trickles. Following catastrophic climate change, large parts of the world have become uninhabitable. Widespread crop failures resulted in Canada siphoning off the topsoil from the Midwestern United States and moving food production North. Canada become the superpower, while the United States fractured into insular and backwards governments, with few resources and consumed by the demands of daily survival.

Borders therefore figure heavily. The line referenced in the book's title is the latitude separating where humans can and cannot survive outside. Professor Rubin imagines this heatstroke line roughly corresponding to Mason-Dixon line, not-so-subtly demarking that portion of the country most opposed to addressing the risks of climate change. And the problem is not just the heat. With climate change come entomological nightmares represented by “biter bugs.” These 3-inch monsters are a cross between a flying piranha and a tick. They burrow into exposed flesh and devour people in a matter of minutes. But the border between the former United States and Canada is equally important. Americans tried fleeing North to Canada but were repelled with guns and death.

The most searing insights of *The Heatstroke Line* therefore lurk in the background. In Professor Rubin's future, life continues but is cheap and death is omnipresent. People are no longer masters of their own destinies but are instead enslaved by an inhospitable environment, and the few havens, like Canada, close their doors and have no compunction about delivering misery and death to their onetime more affluent neighbor. This is a book with a clear message about the threats of climate change. But it also serves as a warning for today's political climate: the sanctuaries of today may produce the refugees of the future, and we must imagine ourselves seeking to escape the ravages of a world that can no longer sustain us. When we become climate refugees, the relevant borders shift.