

mate models that only a few experts understand.

The contribution of climate science to society is not through development of mitigation technologies such as renewable energy, but through development of tools that allow better anticipation of what the future might bring (see how I avoid the term "prediction"). Climate science by itself will not lead to fewer greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The mitigation of climate change is a job that policymakers and the general public need to put into action. However, given this limited but distinctive role of climate research, it is all the more important that the public have faith in the scientists who use those predictive tools. A prophet nobody will listen to is useless. But these are just my own observations; Mody's article convinced me that it is possible to do systematic and objective research that will pinpoint the misunderstandings and gaps in perception between scientists and the public.

What ultimately persuaded me that there is a parallel case between nanotechnology and climate science was when Mody mentioned Michael Crichton's anti-nanotech novel *Prey* (Harper, 2008) and reminded me of the contro-

versy surrounding his *State of Fear* (Avon, 2005).

Wolfgang Knorr
(wolfgang.knorr@bristol.ac.uk)
University of Bristol
Bristol, UK

Conferences are avenue for getting published

The difficulty in getting papers accepted by journal editors is noted in Howard Greyber's letter (PHYSICS TODAY, July 2008, page 8). But that is the reason we have conferences and symposia. A conference paper can present opinions based on observations and analysis; it can challenge conventional wisdom and suggest new ideas and directions.

My last paper before I retired was presented at an international conference. I reported my analysis of observations with a suggestion as to the cause of the results. The meeting room was packed, and I received several compliments. That paper would never have been accepted by a journal editor. I would have been told that my results

were speculative and that I needed to do more research—that phrase, which disregards the reality of funding, seems to be a favorite phrase of editors. The paper was published in the conference proceedings.

Fred E. Camfield
(fecamfield@bellsouth.net)
Vicksburg, Mississippi

Knives determine ages of humans

I would like to correct one small but common error in the article by Graham Fleming and Mark Ratner (PHYSICS TODAY, July 2008, page 28). The terms "Stone Age," "Bronze Age," and "Iron Age" do not "refer to humans' increasing mastery over those materials." They have a specific meaning: the material most commonly used for making knives during the period in question. Today we are still firmly in the Stainless Steel Age, but there is evidence that we may be moving toward the Plastic Age—especially in airports.

Roger Musson
(rmwm@bgs.ac.uk)
British Geological Survey
Edinburgh, UK ■



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