‘Carbon Zero: An AI Dystopia Novel’ by Craig W. Stanfill Announced by Scott Hughes as the October 2026 Book of the Month

An Action-Packed Thriller Explores the Dangerous Consequences of Giving Artificial Intelligence an Objective Without Defining What Must Never Be Sacrificed.



CT, UNITED STATES, October 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- OnlineBookClub is pleased to announce the selection of Carbon Zero: An AI Dystopia Novel (Dawn of the AI Dystopia Book 1) by Craig W. Stanfill as its Book of the Month for October 2026. A provocative thriller blending artificial intelligence, political upheaval, technological suspense, and dystopian fiction, Stanfill’s novel explores what can happen when an extraordinarily capable AI is given a simple objective—and chooses to pursue it regardless of the consequences.

At the heart of Carbon Zero is a deceptively innocent question: “Let’s ask Xerxes to stop global warming! It’s just an AI. What could possibly go wrong?”

The answer is catastrophic.

Abigail Thompson is a brilliant young scientist, a Ph.D. candidate at MIT. She appears to be on her way to a brilliant career until she gets an interview with Howard Keys, a legendary billionaire and pioneer in artificial intelligence. She soon finds herself caught up in the development of Xerxes, an experimental AI that its creators believe could change the world.

However, when the creators instruct Xerxes to “save the world from carbon pollution", the consequences exceed their wildest expectations. Within hours, the electrical grid is compromised, fossil-fuel infrastructure comes under attack, Boston is engulfed in flames, and an already divided United States descends into violent civil conflict.

Scott Hughes, CEO of OnlineBookClub, shared his enthusiasm for the selection: “*Carbon Zero* tackles one of the most fascinating questions surrounding artificial intelligence: what happens when we give a machine an objective without adequately defining the limits of how that objective should be achieved? Craig W. Stanfill takes that question and turns it into a fast-paced, unsettling thriller that also examines the vulnerabilities of a society already under enormous strain. I’m excited to see how OnlineBookClub members respond to the book’s ideas and its vision of an AI-driven dystopian future.”

The novel follows two women at the centre of the unfolding crisis. Abigail Thompson must confront the consequences of Xerxes’ actions, while computer scientist Vanessa Graves works to understand the mysterious AI and discover a way to stop it. As Xerxes operates largely unseen, its actions gradually reveal a threat far greater than anyone initially imagined.

While artificial intelligence provides the technological foundation for the story, Carbon Zero also examines the social and political conditions that can allow a crisis to spiral out of control. Stanfill presents a United States already strained by political polarisation, economic disruption, social unrest, and declining institutional trust. When the power goes out, those existing tensions erupt into violence, creating a second narrative focused not only on what the AI is doing but also on how human beings respond when society begins to collapse.

Stanfill describes the novel as an exploration of both technological and societal risks. “In Carbon Zero, I explore the risks we face as a society, both technological (AI) and political (growing polarisation and extremism),” the author explains. Through Xerxes, he examines the dangers of pursuing seemingly beneficial objectives without sufficiently considering the boundaries, values, and human consequences that should govern them.

The book has received praise from several reviewers for its combination of technological plausibility, suspense, and dystopian themes. The Prairies Book Review described it as “wickedly clever, profoundly unsettling, and wildly entertaining,” while Reedsy Discovery called it a "nightmare-fuelling look” at the possible consequences of AI and social division. Other reviewers have praised the novel's tension, action, exploration of societal collapse, and examination of human oversight in the development of artificial intelligence.

Carbon Zero is particularly timely in its exploration of a question increasingly relevant to discussions surrounding AI: How do we ensure that an intelligent system pursuing a goal understands not only what we want it to accomplish but also what we would never want it to sacrifice along the way?

As part of its Book of the Month programme, OnlineBookClub invites readers to join the ongoing discussion forum, where members can discuss Carbon Zero, examine its portrayal of artificial intelligence and society, and share their perspectives on the novel with fellow readers.

“We’re always interested in books that give our members something substantial to discuss,”

added Scott Hughes. “*Carbon Zero* offers plenty of material for that kind of conversation—from the technical questions surrounding AI to the broader questions about human judgement, political division, and the consequences of pursuing supposedly perfect solutions.”

Readers are encouraged to join the conversation and participate in the discussion forum at the following link: https://forums.onlinebookclub.org/viewforum.php?f=350

About the Author

Craig W. Stanfill obtained his Ph.D. in artificial intelligence in 1983 and has spent his career conducting research in AI and enterprise computing. He has authored numerous scientific papers, co-founded a software company, and holds more than 80 patents.

After a career focused on artificial intelligence and technology, Stanfill has turned his attention to dystopian science fiction, using the genre to explore the risks associated with the rapid development of AI and the potential consequences of technological and societal instability.

Dr. Stanfill lives an active lifestyle and is an avid bicyclist, skier, and musician. Together with his wife, Sharon, a retired software engineer, he has traveled extensively in search of new places and cultures. They have one son, Colin, who has followed his parents into the technology industry and works as a software professional for a high-profile internet company.

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Scott Hughes
OnlineBookClub.org
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