



Big Weather: Chasing Tornadoes in the Heart of America

Mark Senvold

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Following an eccentric band of storm chasers during tornado season, a writer delves deep into our fascination with catastrophic weather

Why do some people chase the kind of storms that would send most people running for their lives? Why is it that devastating weather-and tornadoes in particular-maintain a primal hold on our collective imagination? How to account for the spectacular success of a company like the *Weather Channel*-not just a show, but an entire cable network with 86 million regular viewers, hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue, and one abiding subject, the passing clouds?

With his guide Matt Biddle, an Ahab-like veteran storm chaser, Mark Svensvold draws a portrait of a culture enamored by extremes during a 6,000-mile journey through Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. Along the way, the author encounters an assortment of characters out of a Fellini film: A duo named The Twister Sisters, from St. Cloud, Minnesota; a crowd-pleasing trio from CUPP (California University of Pennsylvania-at Pittsburgh); a team of chaser-scientists who have partnered with an IMAX film-maker from Los Angeles with an armor-plated truck; and a stock car racer from North Carolina whose goal is to drive through a tornado.

At the heart of the excitement are the awe-inspiring events themselves-a tornado that levels a small Nebraska town and the look back at the central Oklahoma tornado outbreak that included the single-most destructive tornado in US history. Similar weather disasters occur each spring in a kind of reverse lottery that has spawned a subculture of catastrophilia. Want to know what a tornado actually sounds like as it blows over or through your house? *Big Weather* answers this while also tracing the ways the sublime, in the classic sense, still has a profound claim upon our imagination.

Big Weather is a wryly observed meditation upon the weather as block-buster event that explores, with an ironic touch, our paradoxical relationship to the biggest story of our age-global warming-and the fate of the earth.

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