



Tornado Alley: Monster Storms of the Great Plains

Howard B. Bluestein

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Tornadoes are the most violent, magnificent, and utterly unpredictable storms on earth, reaching estimated wind speeds of 300 mph and leaving swaths of destruction in their wake. In *Tornado Alley*, Howard Bluestein draws on two decades of experience chasing and photographing tornadoes across the Plains to present a fascinating historical account of the study of tornadoes and the great thunderstorms that spawn them.

A century ago, tornado warnings were so unreliable that they were usually kept under wraps to avoid causing panic over a storm that might or might not materialize. Despite cutting-edge Doppler radar technology and computer simulation, these storms remain remarkably difficult to study. To date, no instrument designed to measure wind speed has ever survived a direct hit by a tornado. Leading scientists still conduct much of their research from the front seat of a speeding van and often contend with jammed cameras, flash floods, flying debris, and windshields smashed by hailstones. Using his own spectacular photographs, Bluestein documents the exhilaration of hair-raising encounters with as many as nine tornadoes in one day, as well as the crushing disappointment of failed expeditions and ruined equipment. Most of all, he recreates the sense of beauty, mystery, and power felt by the scientists who risk their lives to study violent storms.

For scientists, amateur weather enthusiasts, or anyone who's ever been intrigued or terrified by a darkening sky, *Tornado Alley* provides not only a history of tornado research but a vivid look into the origin and effects of nature's most dramatic phenomena.

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