

## CHASING VIOLENT STORMS

As the Satterlees planned for Bennett's party, a storm chaser named Jeff Piotrowski was 230 miles away from Joplin, at his home in Norman, Oklahoma. For more than thirty-five years, Jeff had been studying supercell thunderstorms. These are the violent storms that sometimes unleash tornadoes.

Jeff was looking over the weather forecast for that day. And what he saw worried him. The last month, April 2011, had been one of the most violent weather months in history. An incredible 758 tornadoes had touched down in the United States in April. One of those twisters had killed sixty-four people in the college town of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

May had been quieter. But now the skies were angry again.

For days, Jeff had been keeping his eye on a large and dangerous storm system. It had formed over the waters off Alaska, four thousand miles away. It had crept down the West Coast to California, and then swept across the Rocky Mountains. As it traveled east, it gained strength.

Over the past few days, the storm had dumped two feet of snow on Denver, Colorado. It had blasted Texas with hailstones as big as apples. Over Kansas it became deadly, firing off a small tornado that killed a fifty-three-year-old man.

Jeff and other weather experts believed that this storm system would grow even stronger. They worried that it could join forces with another storm system that was moving up from the south. Conditions were shaping up for dangerous tornadoes later that Sunday afternoon.

But exactly when would they strike? And where?