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Book Review: *Storm Warning: The Story of a Killer Tornado* By Nancy Mathis

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Storm Warning: The Story of a Killer Tornado. By Nancy Mathis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. x + 237 pp. Figure, notes. \$24.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.

As a storm chaser and meteorologist myself, I admit my expectations for this book by an “outsider” were relatively low. For the most part, however, Mathis has gotten it right, evidently as a result of extensive research on her part.

The book alternates in a somewhat erratic fashion between tornado survivor anecdotes and narrative about the events of May 3, 1999, and the science behind those events. From a purely storytelling viewpoint, I find this alternation of topics somewhat distracting, though others might find it entertaining. “This book,” the author says in

her introduction, “is the life story of one tornado on one day and its consequences—not just any tornado, but the most powerful tornado to strike a metropolitan area. It is the life story of a tornado researcher and his legacy—not just any researcher, but the most brilliant meteorological detective of the twentieth century. And it is the story of the lives touched by such a harsh hand on May 3, 1999.” While these somewhat hyperbolic rankings may be arguable close to the truth, the stories of *several* tornadoes are actually told here, as are the stories of *several* researchers. Unfortunately, the book lacks a proper index.

A meteorologist will find some content scientifically inaccurate. For example, on page 29 Mathis states, “The upper levels of the dryline act like a lid on a teakettle, topping the warm, moist air until the air mass becomes so warm and so humid that it no longer can be held back. It continually jabs until the dryline weakens.” This is simply an awful description of the dryline. And anyone knowing the real story of Gary England’s “ambush” interview of Ken Crawford in Clinton, Oklahoma, would find the account she gives on page 90 to be one-sided, at best. Fortunately, she also provides a proper tribute to Ken’s contributions through the Oklahoma Mesonet, a statewide network of 115 automated environmental monitoring stations. The author also repeats the myth (43) that the weather patterns associated with the two separate tornadoes that hit Tinker AFB in March of 1948 were essentially identical, which is not the case. Despite such errors, for the most part the book provides a great deal of interesting material, such as details about the life of severe storms researcher Ted Fujita. If the author has failed to understand some of the science sufficiently well to express all of it correctly in her own words, this is understandable—and forgivable. The book is generally engaging and informative. I can recommend it to those interested in stories about tornadoes and the people associated with their forecasting and research. The author’s “pen portraits” for the characters she’s written about (including myself), many of whom I know, are done well. **Charles A. Doswell III**, *Cooperative Institute for Mesoscale Meteorological Studies, Norman, Oklahoma*.