

Freaks of the Storm: From Flying Cows to Stealing Thunder: The World's Strangest True Weather Stories

AUTHOR: Randy Cerveny

PUBLISHER: Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, NY, 2006

DETAILS: 304 pp., \$16.95 paperback, ISBN 1-560-25801-2

Formatted

Formatted

Formatted

Formatted

In the 1999 film *Magnolia*, includes a scene where the characters encounter what appears to be a plague of biblical proportions when frogs begin falling-dropping from the sky. Just a few fall at first, then the amphibious downpour soon intensifies as thousands of frogs literally rain down upon the street, cars, and a swimming pool. A similar cinematic improbability appears at a pivotal point in the 1996 movie *Twister*, where storm chasers watch a cow fly past their vehicle as they try to outrun a family of tornadoes.

While these scenes may seem to be the stuff of Hollywood or Old Testament scripture, in *Freaks of the Storm*, author Randy Cerveny (a professor of geography at Arizona State University and a *Weatherwise* contributing editor) reveals that such incidents can and, in fact, have occurred throughout history. In *Freaks of the Storm*, Cerveny weaves by weaving historical accounts and anecdotes together with modern meteorological research and records. Cerveny (a professor of geography at Arizona State University and *Weatherwise* contributing editor) describes almost every type of strange weather occurrence imaginable—and many including many that defy imagination—in fascinating detail and with a level of research that underscores his obvious appreciation, if not obsession, with the subject. The book is replete with examples from history, literature, popular media, scientific journals, and even biblical passages that describe the odder side of weather.

Formatted

Formatted

Formatted

Cerveny lays the foundation with a background on several key historians whose chronicles and archives of weather oddities make up the basis of the book, including Charles Fort, an early twentieth-20th century author and researcher into all things unusual, unexplained, or weird.

Subsequent chapters are devoted to specific types of weather phenomena or events: tornadoes, lightning, hail, rain, hurricanes, snow, wind, dust devils, and waterspouts. While Cerveny sprinkles a fair amount of humor throughout the pages, especially with some of the more outlandish tales, he also reminds readers of the seriousness and severity often associated with weather. At the end of each section on a specific type of weather event he outlines safety tips for protecting oneself from such conditions.

Throughout much of the book, Cerveny goes well beyond national boundaries and includes stories from around the globe. These range from the interesting (weather preventing, or, in at least one case, being the opponent in a military battle) and odd (people being cured of medical ailments after being struck by lightning), to the macabre (a coffin swept to sea by a hurricane only to end up at the deceased's home nearly two thousand miles away) and gruesome (natural crucifixion as the result of a tornado). One

~~or two stories may be too much for some readers. Luckily, Cerveny prefaces the most grisly stories with a brief disclaimer.~~

~~The final two chapters present a collection of the oddest weather forecasts and a compilation of U.S. state weather oddities. With the exception of the last chapter, Cerveny goes well beyond national boundaries and includes stories from around the globe. These range from the interesting (weather preventing, or, in at least one case, being the opponent in a military battle) and odd (people being cured of medical ailments after being struck by lightning), to the macabre (a coffin swept to sea by a hurricane only to end up at the deceased's home nearly two thousand miles away) and gruesome (natural crucifixion as the result of a tornado). One or two stories may be too much for some readers. Luckily, Cerveny prefaces the most grisly with a brief disclaimer.~~

While Cerveny provides a solid scientific background for the events whenever possible, some meteorological mysteries, such as huge chunks of ice falling from the sky in the absence of storms or clouds, are presented without explanation, to pique the reader's curiosity. A comprehensive bibliography is included at the end of the book and general sources for many stories are provided throughout the text.

Since each chapter covers a discrete subject, it is easy to read a chapter here or there. This might actually be better than trying to devour the entire volume in one or two sittings, since, due the large number of stories, some of the information may begin to blend together ~~after a while~~. Overall, the writing is clear, concise, and non-technical, making it appealing to amateur weather enthusiasts and professional meteorologists alike.

~~While Cerveny sprinkles a fair amount of humor throughout the pages, especially with some of the more outlandish tales, he also reminds readers of the seriousness and severity often associated with weather. He concludes each focus on a specific type of weather event with a section outlining specific safety tips on how to protect oneself from such conditions.~~ In his own words, Cerveny admits that these stories "are not only meant to entertain you but also to make you ponder weather's impact on virtually every part of our lives."

SEAN POTTER is a Certified Consulting Meteorologist and science writer in New York City.