

Weatherghost

By Colin Blakeslee

There is a meteorologist. He floats from hotel room to hotel room, carrying only a suitcase filled with clothing and essential items, along with a laptop computer. He washes his clothes at the local laundromat; he stares out the translucent, grimy window at the assembling pressure system. He takes his coffee black. He drifts from state to state, sleeping in seedy, remote motels. He goes to bed whenever the day's work is done, sleeping dreamlessly while the morning light filters through patches of cirrus clouds. He works long, obsessive hours, typing his findings into spreadsheets and analyzing archaic weather charts. He is an analyst and a writer, but above all else he is a traveler. He never misses a deadline, and rarely accepts phone calls. He is terse, even taciturn; many of his colleagues find him unpleasant. He was described by his boss at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as, 'not a team player.' He finds solace in the water cycle. He is ten trillion microscopic drops of water inside a closed system.

In some way, he has always been like this. In elementary school, he was intelligent, but distracted. He learned to talk and read early, but that progress slowed. Conversation was a struggle; connection, incomprehensible. His peers ostracized him on the playground, and ignored him in the classroom. Then, in middle school, he began to excel in science, and started to take an interest in homemade meteorology equipment. For a time, the roof of the garage was replete with homemade wind socks and barometers made of jars and plates. Eventually, he graduated to soldering together pieces of sheet metal and steel pipes from the hardware store. In high school, he tinkered for hours every day with a rudimentary weather prediction system. It was powered by dial-up internet, a convoluted, cobbled-together circuit board, his homespun measuring equipment, and raw determination. His bedroom walls were quickly adorned with

science-fair first-place blue ribbons and commemorative plaques. Then came college; after graduation, he was quickly snatched up by the federal government.

Before beginning his life as a nomadic field meteorologist, he attempted to fill the role of a desk-job analyst. Days ticked past as his cubicle resentment grew. Normal social interaction was a chore; when mandated by the law of the office, it became torture. Office politics were bizarre and contradictory; his coworkers erratic and unpredictable. Now he has left that mirage behind. People are mercurial. A low-altitude, high-moisture cumulonimbus cloud, on the other hand, will always give him rain. And words are difficult. Words betray him. He struggles to comprehend people's emotional meanings and form meanings of his own. But the weather is different; the weather doesn't care whether you understand it or not. A raindrop cannot be misinterpreted or misconstrued.

Now he crosses the country by rental car and Greyhound bus, tracking patterns and systems. He seldom speaks to others; when he does, he uses only the necessary words. And if he could have his way, he wouldn't speak at all. All he'd have to do is look upward, to the sky. This is his voice: his voice is a decommissioned and redeveloped military aircraft adorned with weather radar, hurtling into the eye of the supercell storm system, pummeled on all sides by sweeping wind and rain. His voice is the symmetry of a crisp white dome perched atop a steel body, a polarimetric Doppler radar waiting to be activated. His voice is a monumental wall of cloud, hanging low over fields of verdant wildflowers and tawny grain that trembles in the wind. His voice is a digital smear of red, blue and green, the most-likely model superimposed on a map of a small town. His voice is a little boy on a bicycle, the path ahead littered with hail dropped from a blue-green sky. His voice is a thousand chunks of debris, a house scattered and torn asunder by the balletic spinning force of a Category 4 tornado. His voice is three hundred million volts of electricity, arcing down from a cloud. His voice is a cool spring rain at midnight. His voice is the dance of the ancients, his voice is the essence of myth and legend. His voice is an atmosphere all its own.