Tornado Chasers

▲ *Samaras runs back to his car after placing the turtle probe.*

In the U.S., tornadoes are **responsible** for 80 deaths and more than 1,500 injuries each year. Although they **occur** quite **frequently**, tornadoes are difficult to predict. Why? Tornadoes develop from storms, but only some storms have the **potential** to become tornadoes. Meteorologists don't know where and when a storm will touch the ground and turn into a tornado. Today the warning time for a tornado is usually just 13 minutes.

Tim Samaras is a storm chaser. His job is to find tornadoes and follow them. When he gets close to a tornado, he puts a special tool called a *turtle probe* on the ground. This tool measures things like a twister's temperature, humidity[1], and wind speed. With this information, Samaras can learn what causes tornadoes to develop. If meteorologists understand this, they can **warn** people about twisters sooner and save lives.

How does Samaras hunt tornadoes? It's not easy. First he has to find one. Tornados are too small to see using weather satellites[2]. So Samaras can't **rely on** these tools to find a twister. Instead he waits for tornadoes to develop. Every May and June, Samaras drives about 40,000 kilometers (25,000 miles) across an area known as Tornado Alley, looking and hoping to spot a twister.

Once Samaras sees a tornado, the chase begins. But a tornado is hard to follow. Some tornadoes change **direction** several times—for example, moving east and then west and then east again. When Samaras finally gets near a tornado, he puts the turtle probe on the ground. Being this close to a twister is **terrifying**. Debris is flying in the air. The wind is **blowing** at high speed. He must get away quickly.

The work is risky, even for a **skilled** chaser like Samaras. But danger won't stop his hunt for the perfect storm.

[1] **Humidity** is the amount of water in the air.
[2] A **weather satellite** is a tool that circles the Earth and sends back information about the weather.