



Bear v. Shark: The Novel

Chris Bachelder

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So it's kind of like a parlor game, then?...

The question is apparently of Ancient Eastern extraction....

It seems to be a gut thing. The answer just feels right and then you come up with reasons....

Given a relatively level playing field -- i.e., water deep enough so that a Shark could maneuver proficiently, but shallow enough so that a Bear could stand and operate with its characteristic dexterity -- who would win in a fight between a Bear and a Shark?

In this brilliant satire of our media-saturated culture, the sovereign nation of Las Vegas -- the entertainment capital of the world -- is host to Bear v. Shark II. After a disappointing loss in the first matchup between the land and the sea, the bear is back with a vengeance and out for blood. All of America is obsessed with the upcoming spectacle, so tickets are hard to come by. With an essay entitled "Bear v. Shark: A Reason to Live," young Curtis Norman wins a national writing contest and four tickets to the event. The Normans load up their SUV and embark on a road trip to Vegas.

As they head cross-country, the family is besieged by a dizzying barrage of voices: television and radio personalities, public service announcements, bear and shark pundits, Freudians, theologians, and self-published authors, in addition to the Bear v. Shark fanatics, cultists, and resisters they meet at roadside gas stations and restaurants. Overwhelmed by factoids, statistics, and ten-second debates, the Normans -- along with the rest of country -- can't seem to get their facts straight, much less figure out a way to actually communicate with one another. Sound bites and verbal tics predominate; misheard, misunderstood, and just plain mistaken information is absorbed, mangled, and regurgitated to hilarious effect; and the most inane subjects -- from the disappearance of Dutch culture to the Shakespearean bias toward the bear -- are vigorously and obsessively debated. These meaningless exchanges of misinformation leave Mr. Norman disenchanted, world-weary, and ambivalent about the impending show, but the family eventually makes it to Vegas for an apocalyptic and surprisingly emotional ending.

Written in quick, commercial-like segments that mirror the media it satirizes, Chris Bachelder's debut is a fiercely funny, razor-sharp novel about the odd intersection of zealotry and trivia, about the barriers to human connection in a society that values entertainment above all else. Through a clever act of novelistic subterfuge, Bachelder makes us laugh at our penchant for absurd and useless information while drawing us into a dazzling spectacle of his own imagination.

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