

## THE METEOR

by Heather Shaw



Two hundreded fifty million years ago, a cosmic terrorist, a.k.a. a meteorite, struck the Earth.

Eighty percent of all life was wiped out, but the brutal housecleaning paved the way for the subsequent domination of the dinosaurs. Then, 185 million years later, another one flung itself onto the Yucatan coast and annihilated what was left of the big lizards. Small, mammal-like creatures, whose development had been severely restricted by the tyranny of the tyrannosaurus, burrowed deep into their earthy dens and emerged on the other side of the catastrophe as mice, elephants, horses, and men.

I wonder if they felt it coming, those creatures large and small? Did the atmosphere wobble in anticipation? Did they lift their heads and sniff? Did they regret having taken out that extra \$20,000 line of credit, or not having a hybrid anywhere near production, or that running a company based on maintaining pensions and producing dividends for shareholders wasn't necessarily going to lead to innovation or quality?

All right, so I've skipped from the Cretaceous to the age of instant information, personalized everything, and the world in the palm of everyone's hand. Some of our monsters have grown so large they've transmuted and become god-like; others, like the dinosaurs before them, are clumsy, inefficient, unable to feed themselves enough in this new world to maintain body weight. Of course I'm speaking in big fat metaphors, but you know what I mean. You're reading the papers (online, I'm sure), and receiving the afternoon updates from *Shelf Awareness* or *Library Journal* announcing the collapsing, cutbacks, freezes, and layoffs in the publishing industry. At least in the mega-multi-national conglomerate publishing industry.

But what about the other half, the independents?

Judging from the state of our mailroom, they appear to be surviving. More than that, they are, and have always been, transforming themselves to meet the present-day reader halfway. Whether it's through acquiring translations, like David R. Godine, publisher of this year's Nobel Prize winner, J. M. Le Clézio (p. 24), or by publishing very selectively what they believe preserves, educates, or documents, like the university presses (p. 17). And there are the independents like Abbeville, University of California, and Fulcrum featured in *ForeSight Nature* (p. 25), producing large, full-color records of what is precious, extraordinary, rare, or vanishing.

There's no doubt that most reading will eventually be done on some sort of a computer, but that doesn't mean the end of books. There will always be a place and a need for books and the publishers that seek them out, nurture them, and guide them to that utility of ink and paper. Like the creatures that evolved to become man, horse, elephant, and mouse, by being small, selective, nimble, by foraging for what they needed and using every bit of whatever they found, independent publishers will survive and thrive on the other side. **F**

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