



Lastborn: A Phantasmagorical Tale

Prudence Brown Lev

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The unique perspective of a dinosaur, in an equally fascinating landscape, offers both entertainment and insight.

Lastborn, by Prudence Brown Lev, shares the intriguing story of the last *Edmontosaurus annectens*, or flathead, born on the ancient land mass known as Laramidia. Meticulously researched and thoughtfully written, the book presents a unique perspective on what life may have been like at the end of the Cretaceous period, both immediately before and after a giant comet struck Earth.

Lastborn is the final egg in his mother's nest to hatch. He is unique among the hatchlings in that he has inherited a few genetic mutations from his father—camouflage-colored skin and advanced brain function. Initially, he is the least dominant of his siblings, but his ability to learn and adapt quickly helps him survive in a dangerous world. When disaster strikes and most of his herd is wiped out, Lastborn becomes the reluctant leader of a small band of survivors searching for food and water in a world that is no longer recognizable.

Lev crafts an interesting story with a surprising protagonist. The book is remarkable in that it tells the tale from the perspective of the dinosaur without anthropomorphizing Lastborn and the rest of the herd. The emotional and intellectual responses that the dinosaurs have to events are believable and relatable without being too human. These are not the cute caricatures of dinosaurs encountered in cartoons. These are magnificent, fascinating animals occupying an equally fascinating landscape.

Though it would be easy to assume that a story told from a dinosaur's perspective is most appropriate for children, that is certainly not the case here. The book is often graphically violent, and the author does not flinch from the brutality that is no doubt true to the lives these animals experienced. For example, she writes about a confrontation between Lastborn's mother and a *Tyrannosaurus rex* after the tyrannosaurus has eaten another hatchling: "A few strides away, the tyrannosaurus lifts her head from a heap of unrecognizable remains, surprised to see an adult flathead staring back at her. Irritated by the intrusion, the carnivore half belches, half roars at Mother, spraying her with masticated baby parts."

The only thing that is marginally frustrating in the book is that the time frame has been compressed. This gives the plot more excitement than it otherwise might have, but it detracts from the accuracy of the text. Additionally, Lastborn has nearly psychic foresight along with the ability to share thoughts with other genetically mutated flatheads. Though this helps tell the story, it is not clear what scientific basis such an ability might have.

Lev has done a superb job synthesizing research into a compelling narrative. She includes an informative author's note and an extensive bibliography to support the scientific details of the story. Individuals with an interest in paleontology are certain to find *Lastborn* a rewarding and pleasurable book with unique perspective and insight.

CATHERINE THURESON (June 3, 2014)

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