

Speed the Dawn

Philip Donlay

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In Philip Donlay's *Speed the Dawn*, a plausible catastrophe hits California, triggering a lightning pace of events.

Billionaire philanthropist Donovan Nash has assembled the best scientific minds to tackle Earth's environmental problems. His organization supports, among other things, research ships. Shortly before a new ship's dedication, a monstrous meteor strikes off the California coast, bringing with it debris from several Earth-orbiting satellites. The resulting tsunami and fires wipe out cities all along the coast, and Nash, with a friend's widow, is trapped. They must escape raging fires and floodwaters.

This is a story so energetic and realistically portrayed that smoke seems to drift from the book's pages. Nash isn't a natural hero, but he's called to action, while the widow functions as a reactive character.

Nash's wife, Dr. Lauren McKenna, is an analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency and fills the novel's other major role. The opening scene finds her flying through the meteor storm, setting the mood at high tension immediately. The narrative's power doubles as McKenna copes with bureaucracies and egos to confront the disaster, while Nash's perspective gives an onsite view.

Supporting characters fit roles, though some—like a tough and taciturn woman who heads Nash's security team—are made remarkable through slight deviations from their types.

The text realistically grapples with the complex problems that follow natural disasters, which also heighten tension. Explanations of meteors—including the Kessler effect regarding orbital objects—and of the power of tsunamis and the science of fires all reinforce the story's credibility without hurting its pace. As events cascade to threaten areas outside of the immediate strike zone, stellar details make for a cohesive and exciting disaster story.

With whirlwind, high-tension action, *Speed the Dawn* is a quintessential disaster novel and a high-concept thriller.

GARY PRESLEY (March/April 2018)

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