

T. rex and the Crater of Doom

By Walter Alvarez

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Sixty-five million years ago, a comet or asteroid larger than Mt. Everest slammed into the Earth, causing an explosion equivalent to the detonation of a hundred million hydrogen bombs. Vaporized impactor and debris from the impact site were blasted out through the atmosphere, falling back to Earth all around the globe. Terrible environmental disasters ensued, including a giant tsunami, continent-scale wildfires, darkness, and cold, followed by sweltering greenhouse heat. When conditions returned to normal, half the genera of plants and animals on Earth had perished.

This horrific story is now widely accepted as the solution to a great scientific murder mystery what caused the extinction of the dinosaurs? In *T. rex* and the Crater of Doom, the story of the scientific detective work that went into solving the mystery is told by geologist Walter Alvarez, one of the four Berkeley scientists who discovered the first evidence for the giant impact. It is a saga of high adventure in remote parts of the world, of patient data collection, of lonely intellectual struggle, of long periods of frustration ended by sudden breakthroughs, of intense public debate, of friendships made or lost, of the exhilaration of discovery, and of delight as a fascinating story unfolded.

Controversial and widely attacked during the 1980s, the impact theory received confirmation from the discovery of the giant impact crater it predicted, buried deep beneath younger strata at the north coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. The Chicxulub Crater was found by Mexican geologists in 1950 but remained almost unknown to scientists elsewhere until 1991, when it was recognized as the largest impact crater on this planet, dating precisely from the time of the great extinction sixty-five million years ago. Geology and paleontology, sciences that long held that all changes in Earth history have been calm and gradual, have now been forced to recognize the critical role played by rare but devastating catastrophes like the impact that killed the dinosaurs.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
One of the great mysteries is what happened to the dinosaurs, and it has taken great detective work to give us an answer. In *T. Rex and the Crater of Doom*, some brilliant, not to mention determined, scientists roam the world and seek out the clues. What they conclude is that the earth withstood a colossal impact with a meteor (or perhaps a comet) 65 million years ago. The resulting cataclysm destroyed half the life on the planet.

Walter Alvarez, a geologist at the University of California at Berkeley, and one of the four scientists who present this theory on the mystery, tells the story in a clear narrative that contains a wealth of scientific material. The book does require an investment of attention, but the presentation is quite readable, and the story itself is fascinating.

From Library Journal
When Nobel prize-winning physicist Louis Alvarez and his geophysicist son Walter announced that they had discovered evidence of a giant meteor that slammed into Earth 65 million years ago, causing the extinction of the dinosaurs, they were met with much fanfare from the popular press and skepticism from the scientific community. The Alvarezes were vindicated in 1991 when a huge impact crater was discovered on the Yucatan Peninsula, and the possible connection with dinosaur extinction is becoming more widely accepted. After a vivid description imagining the global devastation that would be caused by such an impact, Alvarez offers a first-person account of the discovery. It's a nicely told and well-written tale of scientific discovery, and though he occasionally comes across as a bit smug, Alvarez is quite generous in crediting objectors for helping show the direction to improve and refine the theory with further research. This informal, readable book is appropriate for high school readers on up, and the subject has strong popular appeal.?Amy Brunvand, Univ. of Utah Lib., Salt Lake City
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From Booklist
Alvarez, along with four other Berkeley scientists, found the geologic evidence that implicated a cosmic collision in the extinction of the dinosaurs. Imagining that cataclysm, Alvarez opens with the appearance of an approaching comet, growing brighter until it slams into the Yucatan Peninsula, exploding with energy equal to 10 thousand times the world's nuclear arsenal. Having locked in readers with that apocalyptic drama, Alvarez recounts how he can write such a scientifically accurate disaster script. It has two parts: the evaluation of a thin iridium-rich layer of clay found in Italy and the search for an impact crater. Lying between the Cretaceous-Tertiary (KT) boundary in rocks, the clay was mysterious in origin and its iridium source difficult to pin down: a supernova was theorized for a while. Alvarez then clearly describes tell-tale geologic clues that revealed the now-buried crater, rounding out a fascinating proof of a once ridiculed theory. In fitting together the puzzle of dino demise, Alvarez excitingly shapes the story for the widest audience. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marc Starr:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time

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