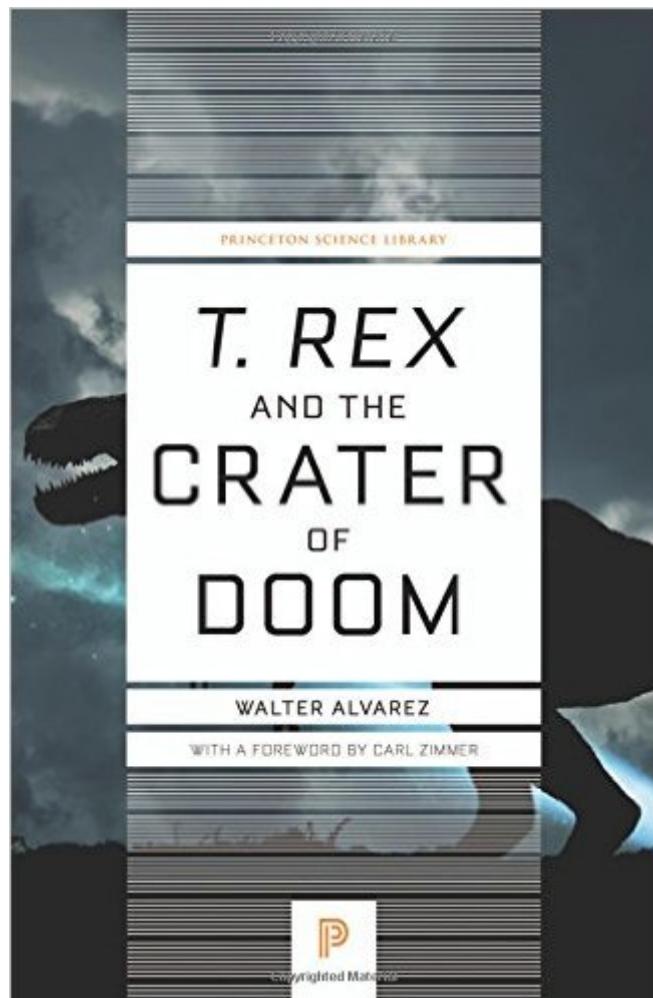


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"T. Rex" And The Crater Of Doom (Princeton Science Library)



Synopsis

Sixty-five million years ago, a comet or asteroid larger than Mount Everest slammed into the Earth, inducing an explosion equivalent to the detonation of a hundred million hydrogen bombs. Vaporized detritus blasted through the atmosphere upon impact, falling back to Earth around the globe. Disastrous environmental consequences ensued: a giant tsunami, continent-scale wildfires, darkness, and cold, followed by sweltering greenhouse heat. When conditions returned to normal, half the plant and animal genera on Earth had perished. This horrific chain of events is now widely accepted as the solution to a great scientific mystery: what caused the extinction of the dinosaurs? Walter Alvarez, one of the Berkeley scientists who discovered evidence of the impact, tells the story behind the development of the initially controversial theory. It is a saga of high adventure in remote locations, of arduous data collection and intellectual struggle, of long periods of frustration ended by sudden breakthroughs, of friendships made and lost, and of the exhilaration of discovery that forever altered our understanding of Earth's geological history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Author Walter Alvarez wrote in the Preface to this 1997 book, "This book is the story of how Earth historians uncovered the evidence for one great catastrophe in the Earth's past--the impact of a huge rock that fell from outer space 65 million years ago, excavating an enormous crater in the YucatÃ¡n Peninsula of Mexico and causing such disturbance to the environment that a wide variety of plants and animals perished forever. The most famous of the victims was the great carnivorous

dinosaur, Tyrannosaurus rex... It has been my privilege to be involved in this adventure from the first discovery of evidence for a great impact at the time of the dinosaur extinction. For the first ten years or so, many scientists found more and more evidence supporting that impact, but all efforts to find the crater were in vain. Finally, in 1991, the long-sought crater was recognized, buried beneath the YucatÁn Peninsula." (Pg. x-xi) [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 185-page 1997 paperback edition.] He points out, "Large impacts... were frequent in the early history of the solar system, as witnessed by the ancient crater-scarred face of the Moon. But large impacts are rare nowadays, because the debris that was abundant in the early solar system has been swept up by the planets, large Earth-crossing comets and asteroids are now rare, and Earth is a very small target." (Pg. 6) He adds, "Our horror at the destruction caused by the impact is eased by the understanding that only because of this catastrophe did evolution embark on a course which, 65 million years later, has led to us. We are the beneficiaries of Armageddon." (Pg. 17) He notes that formerly, "Dinosaurs, in the general opinion, became extinct with a whimper, not a bang. It did indeed look that way; dinosaur bones are rare, the stratigraphic record is very incomplete, and with few fossils preserved, a sudden extinction appears gradual. Tyrannosaurus rex... is known only from a few fossil specimens. Clearly this does not provide enough information to distinguish a sudden extinction from a gradual one." (Pg. 57-58) He observes, "When the environmental disruptions from the impact had waned and the mammal survivors emerged into a new world, they must have faced grave dangers and great opportunities... Other niches must have opened up, and the most notable are the niches for larger land animals. Before their extinction, the dinosaurs held possession of these niches, and all mammals were small. But one of the most remarkable features of mammal evolution after the KT extinction was the rapidity with which large land mammals evolved. In addition, the NUMBER of mammal species quickly went up, as mammals evidently found all kinds of new niches--new ways to exploit the world around them." (Pg. 131) He says, "Early in our KT work, our Berkeley group imagined that all mass extinctions were caused by impacts. That may still be the case, but it is important to emphasize that nothing like the panoply of impact evidence as the KT boundary has been found for any other mass extinction." (Pg. 140-141) This is an engagingly-written account, which will also be useful as an introduction to this subject.

Very slow.

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