

What Killed the Dinosaurs?

by Dana Mackenzie

They dominated the earth for 160 million years. Then suddenly, about 65 million years ago, the dinosaurs seemed to vanish. Every fierce *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Every armor-plated *Triceratops*. Every duck-billed *Edmontosaurus* and swift-running *Velociraptor*. What could have been mighty enough to kill them all?

Until recently, scientists didn't know. Now many think that it took two powerful

forces to bring the age of dinosaurs to an end. One hurtled in from outer space. The other came boiling up from deep within the earth. Perhaps the dinosaurs could have survived one of these catastrophes, but the combination was too much for them to bear.

It Came from Outer Space

Our solar system is a messy place. Besides the nine planets, it also contains

countless smaller chunks of rock. Many orbit in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Others lurk in the dusty debris left behind when comets streak around the sun. Earth passes through a few such debris fields every year, which create beautiful and harmless showers of meteors (rock particles that burn up in the atmosphere, creating the illusion of "shooting stars").