

# Asteroids From Outer Space?



The sun isn't as bright as usual, because high gray dust clouds shield the earth. The animals that the *Coelophysis* dinosaurs usually eat are becoming hard to find. The dinosaurs have become very thin; their scales are dull. Their tails—normally carried high—are drooping. Weak and exhausted, the dinosaurs fall, one by one, and do not get up.

Scientists Walter and Luis Alvarez of the University of California have suggested a reason why dinosaurs became extinct around 65 million years ago. The Alvarazes said that maybe a huge asteroid falling out of orbit from outer space struck the earth. The collision would have sent great clouds of dust into the air that blocked sunlight and cooled the earth. A cooler earth couldn't support the same kinds of plants and animals. Many species that needed warm temperatures would die.

Claim: \_\_\_\_\_

Evidence/Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation/Justification: \_\_\_\_\_

Rebuttal/Counter Claim: \_\_\_\_\_

My Thoughts/Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

Not all paleontologists accept this reason for the extinction of dinosaurs, but it is an attractive one. A small amount of a rare element-iridium-has been found in many 65 million-year-old rocks. Asteroids often have more iridium than earth rocks, so an asteroid may indeed have brought this element to earth. Could an earlier asteroid, 225 million years ago, have caused climatic changes that killed *Coelophysis*?

The facts don't fit this picture at Ghost Ranch. The dinosaurs aren't scattered over a large area, as they would be if they collapsed, one by one, from hunger. And so far no one has found unusual amounts of iridium in the rocks. Asteroid extinctions don't seem to agree with what we have learned about *Coelophysis*.