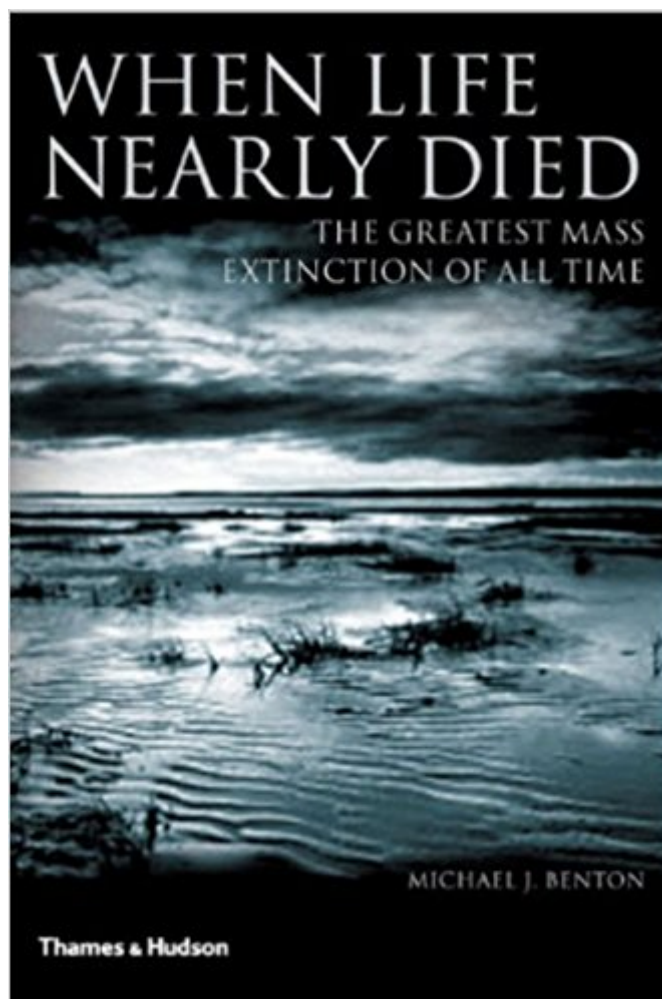


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# When Life Nearly Died: The Greatest Mass Extinction Of All Time



## Synopsis

"The focus is the most severe mass extinction known in earth's history. The science on which the book is based is up-to-date, thorough, and balanced. Highly recommended."—Choice Today it is common knowledge that the dinosaurs were wiped out by a meteorite impact 65 million years ago that killed half of all species then living. Far less known is a much greater catastrophe that took place at the end of the Permian period 251 million years ago: ninety percent of life was destroyed, including saber-toothed reptiles and their rhinoceros-sized prey on land, as well as vast numbers of fish and other species in the sea. This book documents not only what happened during this gigantic mass extinction but also the recent rekindling of the idea of catastrophism. Was the end-Permian event caused by the impact of a huge meteorite or comet, or by prolonged volcanic eruption in Siberia? The evidence has been accumulating through the 1990s and into the new millennium, and Michael Benton gives his verdict at the end of the volume. From field camps in Greenland and Russia to the laboratory bench, *When Life Nearly Died* involves geologists, paleontologists, environmental modelers, geochemists, astronomers, and experts on biodiversity and conservation. Their working methods are vividly described and explained, and the current disputes are revealed. The implications of our understanding of crises in the past for the current biodiversity crisis are also presented in detail. 46 illustrations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Covers a lot of information, but he connects it all in a readable and interesting way; a balanced and open-ended viewpoint. -- Library Journal Paints a vivid picture of science as a

quintessentially human endeavor; an ongoing search for better understanding. -- Niles Eldredge, American Museum of Natural History

Michael Benton is Professor of Vertebrate Paleontology and Head of the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Bristol. He has written over forty books, many of them standard technical works and textbooks, as well as popular books about dinosaurs and the history of life.

One of the very best books I have ever read. Key word, "Nearly". This is concise, extraordinarily researched. chronicle of earth as most students or professionals, from age twelve and up with passion for the subject would find...I am one of those chronic students who "immerses" herself in reading. I highly recommend this Author as a Master of earth studies.

Good coverage of the Permian mass extinction. Includes a number of chapters on the development of the concept of the Permian, as well as the complex ecosystems at the end of the Permian. The antepenultimate chapter reviews several potential causes and advances a "synthetic" solution of a number of causes, with the first, the Siberian Traps eruptions, being the first domino to go over and trigger other others, one after another. The next chapter covers the recovery in the Early Triassic, which took an exceptionally long time, and did not happen (or last) for over 90% of marine and terrestrial species. I had not realized the pervasiveness of the overall event which took out a large amount of land plants, with major groups being lost or severely reduced. The final chapter explores the idea of potential consequences of the next extinction event, which some think we are in the beginning of. I did not find the book overly technical; it is heavily footnoted for those who would wish to go further..

Thoroughly engrossing, well written, and filled with unexpected and fascinating observations. Coverage of the book's nominal content- recent discoveries about the end Permian mass extinction- is excellent, but I especially enjoyed the discussion of those discoveries' historical context. For someone familiar with the broad outlines of contemporary thought on the end Permian event but lacking deep knowledge this was a great and surprisingly enjoyable read.

Readers should be prepared for a detailed account of the history of geology and paleontology! One can learn a lot along the way about the challenges of determining what happened a quarter of a billion years ago. While it has been clear for a long time that there was a mass extinction at the end

of the Permian era, it is difficult to know what was the cause of this event, and to know how sudden it was. Was it due to the impact of a comet or asteroid, similar to that which wiped out the dinosaurs? The competing explanation is that it was due to the vast eruptions of lava in Siberia, known as the Siberian Traps. The author seems to lean toward this explanation. Not only would these eruptions fill the atmosphere with many noxious and greenhouse gases, they might trigger eruption of the methane hydrates buried under the ocean, further upsetting the atmosphere. The whole scenario is reminiscent of what may be in store for our planet in the not too distant future, due to human-induced climate change.

... is exquisitely covered in this wonderful book. Beginning with a description of paleontological trends and personalities, and ending with a very complete description of the Permian extinction, the post extinction recovery, and a glimpse into the future of extinction, this is an EXTREMELY HIGHLY recommended book for everyone and anyone. Very readable and a very well done tome.

A clearly written and readable book giving an interpretation and possible explanation for the End-Permian mass extinction. This book describes and explains the rise of the science of Geology. Geologists disagree to an amazing extent. When Life Nearly Died includes early geologists and the foundations of their studies in order to provide a balanced and understandable description of the beginnings and development of living things. This becomes the platform from which the author gives his explanation that there was a mass extinction 251 my ago and attempts to explain how and why it happened. I liked the way the Alvarez Study of the Cretaceous-Tertiary meteor impact was used to fill in the explanation of that type of catastrophic event that changed the world 65 million years ago. Read the book yourself. You'll enjoy it. JdN

This book is more about geology and how geologic standards were created than it was about the greatest mass extinction. MAYBE 20% of this book was information on the Permian mass extinction. But still worth the read, especially if you're into geology.

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