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HUGE
fold-out
pages!

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DINOSAUR DYNASTY

B
I
G
P
I
C
T
U
R
E
P
R
E
S

DISCOVER THE RISE OF THE RULING REPTILES

CONTENTS



10



12



JURASSIC

20

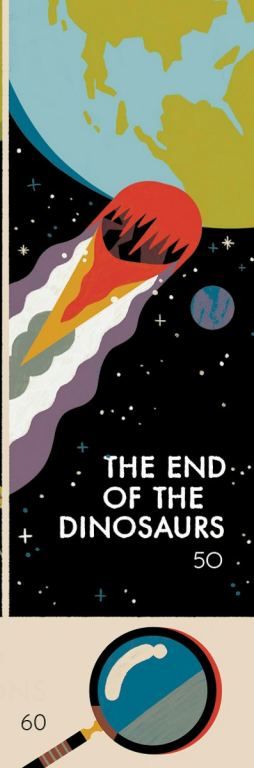


32



CRETACEOUS

38



THE END
OF THE
DINOSAURS

50

60



THE AGE OF REPTILES

Hundreds of millions of years ago **dinosaurs** ruled the planet. This period, from around 252 million to 66 million years ago, is known as the **Mesozoic era**. Soaring **reptiles** armed with sharp beaks and claws streamed through the skies, the oceans were teeming with snappy prehistoric **predators** and the land belonged to a vast array of mighty dinosaurs.

Hitting the big time

The Mesozoic era spanned 186 million years, over 600 times longer than us modern humans have been on the planet (a measly 300,000 years). This is split up into three periods; the **Triassic**, **Jurassic** and **Cretaceous**. During this epic chunk of time, some animals died out and others changed to survive. This is called **evolution**.



Triassic Earth



Jurassic Earth



Cretaceous Earth

The moving world

In the beginning of the Mesozoic era, all land on earth was joined together to form a giant supercontinent known as **Pangaea**. The land – and all the creatures living on it – drifted apart during the next 186 million years to look more like the Earth as it is today. Back then, our planet was warmer, with vast desert plains, flourishing forests and everchanging habitats due to the moving land.



A mixed bag

Scientists now know of over 1000 different **genera** of dinosaur, with around 50 new genera discovered each year. There were speedy sprinters, gentle giants, armoured hunks and formidable predators. They range from tiny reptiles that could sit on your finger to aeroplane-sized behemoths that proudly stand in today's museums. Our own ancient ancestors lived through the dinosaur dynasty, but they were simple, tiny rodent-like mammals that lived in the shadows of the mighty reptiles.

TRIASSIC

From 252 to 201 million years ago, Pangaea was mostly dry and warm, with windy monsoons sweeping across the planet from time to time. Towering forests, arid desert plains and vast fern prairies provided homes for early amphibians and reptiles.



WHAT CAME BEFORE

The Triassic began with the largest ever mass extinction around 252 million years ago, when at least 50% of all life on earth was wiped out. Entire groups of reptiles, early mammals, insects and aquatic life disappeared, but some creatures survived. These included crocodile and dinosaur ancestors called archosaurs and early mammals called synapsids.



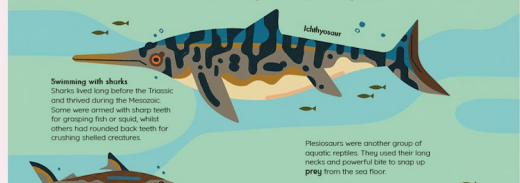
Ruling the skies

Towards the end of the Triassic, a group of archosaurs took to the skies tens of millions of years before birds. These are now known as pterosaurs. The outer structure of a pterosaur wing was formed by one long finger, with a thin layer of skin stretching from the fingertip to the back legs. Their soft-shelled eggs (similar to today's snake eggs) have been discovered fossilised in ancient nesting grounds where colonies of pterosaurs once nurtured their young.



Making waves

At some point in their prehistoric past, certain land reptiles slowly evolved to master life in the oceans instead. Ichthyosaurs looked like a cross between a crocodile and a dolphin, with flippers, a wide tail and a long, thin snout with plenty of teeth for eating fish, squid and shellfish. The smallest ichthyosaurs were about the length of an otter, whilst the largest matched the size of a whale.



Swimming with sharks

Sharks lived long before the Triassic and thrived during the Mesozoic. Some were armed with sharp teeth for grasping fish or squid, whilst others had rounded back teeth for crushing shelled creatures.

