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Vocabulary: Science 词汇: 科学

What is the greatest threat to life on our planet? Is it climate change? Shortages of food or water? Or might an altogether bigger danger come from somewhere further away: space?

We're not talking about an invasion by **little green men** here. Instead, how about the prospect of being hit by a gigantic **meteorite**, zapped by lethal **cosmic rays** or fried by the deadly energy of an erupting star?

It wouldn't be the first time. **Good old** planet Earth has had a **rough ride** over the last 3.7 billion years, with some spectacularly devastating events. The most famous **mass extinction** was 66 million years ago, when it's widely believed a meteorite **killed off** the dinosaurs. A 110-mile-wide **crater** in Mexico with the same **geological** age supports this theory.

Believe it or not, this wasn't the most brutal episode in our planet's history. That was when a staggering 96% of life was **wiped out** at the end of the Permian period, 252 million years ago. Scientists don't know for sure why this happened, but any potential explanations carry with them the grim possibility that similar events could happen again.

For example, some experts believe that our Sun has a very **dense**, dim twin star which is too far away to observe directly. This sleeping giant, dubbed the "Death Star", could distort the paths of **orbiting** chunks of icy rock and hurl them towards the rest of the **Solar System**.

Is this what happened 252 million years ago? Or is there instead, perhaps, a distant, ninth planet in our Solar System which pulls in passing **comets** and sends them **hurtling** our way?

If that isn't enough to **put you off** your breakfast, then consider what's happening to our friend, the Sun. The star that has given us the warmth to sustain life is gradually turning into a deadly foe. Like all stars, it is slowing dying, burning through its energy supplies. As it does so, it expands, and in about 2 billion years it will have grown so much that the heat will make life on planet Earth unbearable.

While all this sounds a little **macabre**, take comfort from the fact that the chance of being hit by a giant **interstellar** projectile is incredibly slim, and that 2 billion years is a very long time.

And there's another thing: if the dinosaurs had not **snuffed it** when they did, it's extremely unlikely that human beings would have had the chance to evolve at all.

词汇表

little green men	(比喻) 外星人
meteorite	陨星、陨石
cosmic ray	宇宙射线
good old	(赞美语气) 老牌的、靠谱的
a rough ride	一段艰难的历程
mass extinction	物种大灭绝
to kill off	杀死、消灭
crater	(火山口式的) 圆坑
geological	地质的
to wipe out	彻底灭绝
dense	密度大的
to orbit	沿轨道围绕(行星或恒星)运行
Solar System	太阳系
comet	彗星
to hurtle	猛冲
to put someone off (something)	丧失对某事的兴致
macabre	恐怖的, 令人害怕的
interstellar	星际的
to snuff it	(俗语) 死亡, 断气

测验与练习

1. 阅读课文并回答问题。

1. When did dinosaurs become extinct?
2. What evidence is there that a meteorite wiped out the dinosaurs?
3. Why was 96% of life destroyed at the end of the Permian period?
4. Which verb means: 'to throw'?
5. True or false: All stars eventually run out of energy.

2. 请你在不参考课文的情况下完成下列练习。选择一个意思合适的单词填入句子的空格处。

1. Last year was _____. I'm glad to see the end of it.

rough riding	a rough rider	a rough ride	rough ride
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2. Washing clothes in boiling water _____ bacteria.

makes extinct	kills off	snuffs	wipes off
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3. Can we change the topic? Talking about it _____ my food.

put me off	puts off	puts off me	puts me off
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4. One day I'd love to travel to _____! I'd even buy a one-way ticket to Mars.

space	the space	the Space	spaces
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5. Earth orbits _____.

the Sun	the Moon	the planets	the solar system
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答案

1. 阅读课文并回答问题。

1. When did dinosaurs become extinct?

Many scientists believe that dinosaurs became extinct 66 million years ago.

2. What evidence is there that a meteorite wiped out the dinosaurs?

A huge crater was discovered which struck Earth at the same time as when the dinosaurs became extinct.

3. Why was 96% of life destroyed at the end of the Permian period?

Scientists aren't sure why this happened. It may have been caused by an object hitting the Earth, for example a comet or icy rock sent our way by a dim star or ninth planet.

4. Which verb means: 'to throw'?

To hurl.

5. True or false: All stars eventually run out of energy.

True. All stars eventually burn through their energy supplies.

2. 请你在不参考课文的情况下完成下列练习。选择一个意思合适的单词填入句子的空格处。

1. Last year was **a rough ride**. I'm glad to see the end of it.

2. Washing clothes in boiling water **kills off** bacteria.

3. Can we change the topic? Talking about it **puts me off** my food.

4. One day I'd love to travel to **space**! I'd even buy a one-way ticket to Mars.

5. Earth orbits **the Sun**.