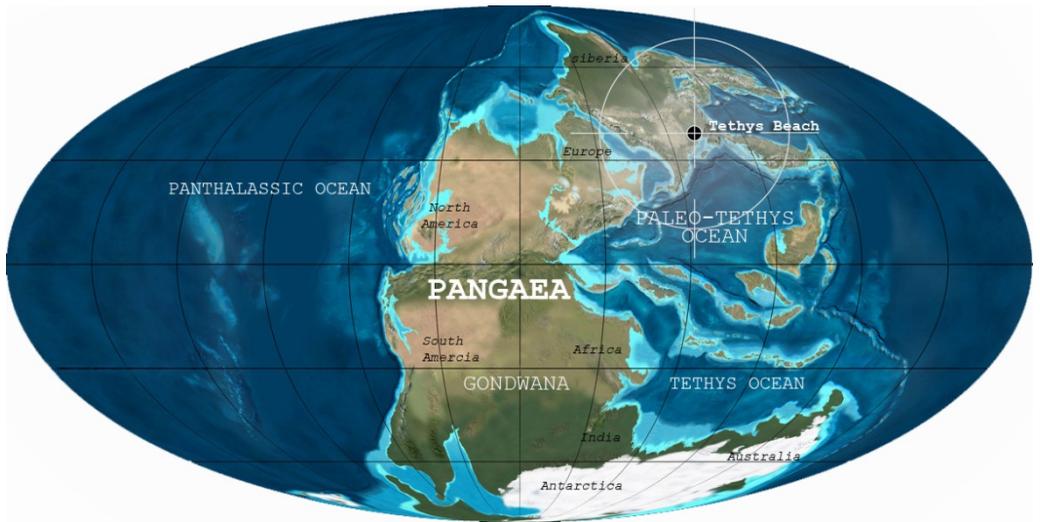




NOT GUN ONE
TETLINS
BEACH

Kerry Plowright

250 Million Years Ago



The unusual discoveries made by Hamilton and I-Haqq on the slopes of Sikiram Mountain had many names, but 251 million years ago they were both part of a single piece of incredibly rare metal floating through the asteroid belt. After a minor disruption within the belt it along with hundreds of other space rocks were ejected from their normal orbit to cross paths with ours, blazing a trail of fire as they entered the atmosphere at over 48,000 kilometers per hour before impacting on Pangaea's coastline, Earth's only continent at the time. There it lay undisturbed for hundreds of thousands of years before eventually feeling the sun again, and then for only a moment. But this moment was critical as the ancient space debris was about to be launched on a journey of time that would eventually impact all humankind.

Tethys Beach, Northern Pangaea,

Located in Northern Pangaea, Tethys Beach is a mile-long sandy shore fringed on one side by thick sub tropical rain forest and crystal clear ocean on the other. It is where one of mankind's most enduring mysteries makes its way into the archaeological record. On this spot, 250 million years ago, the end of

the world for almost all living creatures on the planet is just hours away. The day had begun like most others in the millennia before it with one exception; it was really quiet. The silence was both chilling and ominous, saturating the still morning air.

The sun rising in the east shone obliviously through the portentous atmosphere below, its light dancing innocently over the water's surface while small waves played along the beach. Palm trees and balmy temperatures created a post card perfect setting.

As the morning wore on the menacing silence lingered. Creatures that normally filled the air with noise seemed without voice, and the weather held its breath in a hushed chorus. It was almost as if the creatures and Mother Nature knew that their time was up, their silence a capitulation to the end of an era, a very big one that had lasted hundreds of millions of years. The uncharacteristic calm, however, was not the only curiosity. Poking through the soft sand was the impact material, bright, shiny and entirely incongruous to its surroundings; age and another eternity would confer the term "relic" to it. Cosmic chance was about to roll the dice again and set the piece on a collision course through earth's history that would eventually impact all human kind.

Tethys Beach was situated on the eastern shore of a shallow sea in the northern hemisphere of the super continent Pangaea. It would have been a great holiday destination. But, and this is a big BUT, you would have been in for a very nasty surprise if time travel was possible and you had been able to book a trip for that day and place; because as you may be beginning to sense the rest of the day is about to turn real ugly. To begin with, after enjoying a big breakfast at Continental Pangaea, you might have been tempted to take an early morning swim. Walking down the beautiful beach, fixated on the water you would have been forgiven if you had missed the big-ass, lizard-like creature with huge teeth further down the beach. With long legs and a mammalian-looking face, it had not come to the beach for a swim. It was looking for meat -- any meat it could catch.

After hitting the water you do finally notice this monstrosity and hope like hell the Eryops, as it is called, can't swim. While that thought penetrates your brain you notice something else, a small tremor in the sea floor beneath your feet. Your ancient travel agent might have forgotten to tell you about these spasmodic eruptions that had been occurring off and on there for a couple of years -- nothing too frightening, at least not until then. Unfortunately

for you, on the opposite side of the planet a large asteroid has smashed into what is now the Wilkes Land region of East Antarctica leaving a 300 mile wide crater and triggering a tectonic rift which would result in the breakup of the Gondwana super-continent. Five times larger than the dinosaur killer that hit the



Yucatan peninsula, The Wilkes meteor was thirty miles wide, the energy of its impact travelling to its apogee close to where you are standing – the Siberian Traps. But you didn't know that. Instead, you are watching the big-ass Eryops and cursing your travel agent, while the water you begins to noticeably warmer.

You ponder making a race for it up the beach, wondering whether your travel insurance pays out for being boiled to death or eaten by a big-ass lizard. But before you get to think about it any further, both you and the Eryops are killed. You see, this is close to where the whole thing begins – the biggest death event of all time. Right near here a huge fissure in the earth opens through which an enormous mass of magma vomits to the surface. Like the bleeding from an arterial stab wound it does not stop, continually pumping the red hot blood of the planets molten interior onto the surface. Where new land rises, another sinks. So on the shores of this shallow sea from where the calamity began, you and a big-ass lizard are boiled, burned and gassed to death. Within minutes the land on which you and the lizard had stood subsides, the beach swallowed by the boiling sea, which then smothers much of the land, eventually joining with the Tethas Ocean far to the east. Volcanic sediment sinks into the water entombing you and the lizard in a grip that will hold you for hundreds of millions of years. There is one consolation in your untimely demise: you don't die alone and it all happens quickly.

Immediately after you and your lizard mate die, more fissures open up until more than 2 million square kilometers are covered with molten lava. Outside of this immediate kill zone, dust clouds and acid aerosols block out the sunlight, disrupting photosynthesis both on land and in the sea, causing the food chain to collapse. Acid rain falls, killing plants as well as mollusks

and plankton whose calcium carbonate shells dissolve. Massive pyroclastic flows consisting of ash and other debris are thrown high into the atmosphere, increasing the short-term cooling effect on the planet. Following this nuclear winter, the pendulum swings violently back and mass emissions of carbon dioxide cause global warming. The erupting basalt lava then intrudes into the massive deposits of carbonate rocks and sediments which were in the process of forming large coal beds, setting them alight and emitting even larger amounts of carbon dioxide, leading to stronger global warming.

Yet, even after all this the Earth's temperature rises only 1.5°C and life persists; for those creatures that had survived there was hope. But, unfortunately, the warming was just enough to cause the methane hydrates near the poles to melt, creating a lethal positive-feedback warming loop. The Polar ice then melted, more acid rain fell, and the eruptions continued, setting off a catastrophic event that resulted in the greatest mass extinction ever recorded in Earth history; even the End Cretaceous extinction that would later fell the dinosaurs paled in comparison. More than 95 percent of all species were made extinct. After millions of years of continual assault, the Earth and its oceans were almost barren.

Beneath the now-dead oceans the remains of nearly 289 million years of evolution -- life that had become equally as complex and diversified as what we see today -- lay buried. While only a fraction of that would ever survive as fossils, something else was left behind that was far less abundant than any fossil, but far more enduring.

Over time the remains of you and the lizard are mixed with others, including a euryptids, a huge sea scorpion that had once ruled the Permian ocean.

Let's zoom forward a few years: remember that fateful day when all the earth-ending began, in addition to you and the big-ass lizard on the beach, there were the relics -- the artefact's. they became buried within the fossil record as well, resting with the sea scorpion and long-legged lizard. (You of course are just fiction, something to make the story more interesting.) What is real is that after 250 million years of oblivion, when the relics and pristine fossils of the lizard and sea scorpion are found, the destiny of man would change forever.

Now let's move quickly. After the lizard, sea scorpion and all their friends buy the farm in this mass extinction, the dinosaurs then rise and rule the planet for

160 million years. Ninety-five million years later or 65 million years ago, they too are wiped out.

Then, approximately one million years ago something extraordinary happened. At that time the evolution of apes had reached a point where they were living longer, walking upright and learning how to use tools and communicate. But they were a long way from being anything close to modern humans and even tens of million years of evolution would not bring to where we are today. This is the part that is truly astonishing, inexplicably and seemingly out of no where, The gene called miR-941, along with a bunch of others emerged fully functional out of non-coding genetic material or junk DNA. Specifically miR-941 is highly active in two areas of the brain, controlling decision-making and language abilities. This turbo charged the evolution of brain functions resulting in Homo heidelbergensis and from there Neanderthals and Homo sapiens.

Over 500,000 MYA, in Kathu Pan South Africa, Homo heidelbergensis invent lethal hunting weapons, new technologies of stone tips for spears and axes that are passed on to the next branches of evolution. Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon man, both with larger brains than ours, thrive then disappear and we take center stage. We invent more tools and weapons and around 10,000 years ago begin to play with metal and fire, transforming the world we live in. It is this early quest for metal ore where mankind's first version of an archaeologist begins to search Earth's ancient past for riches; this is where after almost a quarter of a billion years the fossils of our long dead critters and the ancient relic finally see the light of day once more. This occurs in Biblical times when the law was written in stone, pharaohs built pyramids and a new god prevailed upon the people.



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